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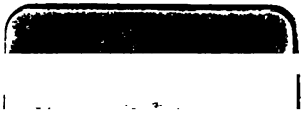

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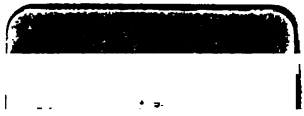

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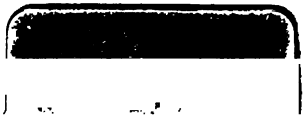

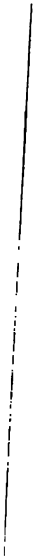

MY PARISH;

OR,

"The Country Parson's" Visits to his Poor.

SECOND SERIES.

Preparing for Publication.

MANNA IN THE HOUSE;

OR, DAILY COMMENTS ON

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY THE

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER.

"As he passed along the aisle, the clerk stood at the opened door of his old seat, ready to invite him in."—P. 28.

MY PARISH;

OR,

"The Country Parson's" Visits to his Poor.

BY

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER, A.M.

The years revolve—and I again explore
The simple annals of my village poor.
CRABBE.

Second Series.

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MY PARISH.

SECOND SERIES.

EVELING LODGE.

"All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."
Psalm xlii. 7.

CHAPTER I.

"WHOSE family was that which sat in a seat to the left of the reading-desk?" I asked of my churchwarden, who had accompanied me to church on the first Sunday of my officiating there, and who was now returning with me to the Rectory.

"They interested me much by their appearance and deportment, and I think comprised three generations, from the aged grandsire to the almost infant grandchild."

"It was old Mr. Eveling, his son and wife, and their young family. They are our most regular attendants at church. You perhaps saw the old man's name over the choir as churchwarden, some thirty years ago."

I had indeed glanced at the inscription, dated in 1795, in which the name, with a vanity inherent, I believe, in all churchwardens, was conspicuously painted in large blue letters on a sort of lemon-coloured ground, intended to hand him down to some half-century of immortality, till another repair of the edifice should erase the name, and substitute another claimant for his equally brief period of fame.

The group, however, in the pew had struck me much, as the service proceeded, by the simple fervour which marked their devotions, the punctuality and loudness of the response which proceeded from the lips of the old man, and the ready aptness with which the elder boy turned to the appointed portions of the service, both in the Bible and Prayer-book. The grandfather was a remarkably hale old gentleman, with a ruddy countenance; and, though the lines of age were strongly and even more deeply indented than usual in his features, his still dark locks, with but here and there a few grey hairs straggling among them, told of a green and vigorous age; and it was with much surprise I heard that nearly fourscore years had "shed their winters o'er his brow." The son was considerably taller than his father, with a fine, open, manly countenance, and struck one at the first glance as a capital specimen of an honest English farmer. His wife was apparently younger than her husband, and her tall and graceful figure, a somewhat pale complexion, dark expressive eyes, and pencilled

features gave to her a character, perhaps, above her station in life. A young child, apparently not more than a year old, was nestling in her bosom in all the ruddy glow of sleep; two more children, the elder, the boy I have already mentioned, about six years of age, by the side of his grandfather, and the younger, a girl, on her father's knee, completed the group, and presented altogether such a picture of a well-regulated and religious family, that it was no wonder they attracted my notice, and prompted the question which I addressed to my companion afterwards.

Some days elapsed before I could effect a visit to Mr. Eveling. He lived at what, I believe, in many of the midland counties of England, and certainly in Northamptonshire, are called "lodges," or separate houses on the respective farms, the generality of the cultivators of land residing in the villages themselves. A clear sunny day, however, in January, with sufficient frost to render our lanes passable, invited me to walk, and I soon found myself on the road to EVELING LODGE. The day, as many a day in January often is, was bracing and exhilarating; and though I cannot say much for the scenery which marked my path, and though the walk wanted that accompaniment of the song of birds which enlivens spring, still the leafless hedges were busy with their chirpings, as if they too enjoyed the sunshine of heaven. There is something highly interesting in watching the occupations of birds; they have all the engaging sportiveness of

childhood in their movements—something too, with some of them at least, of its trustfulness. The variety of their flight and note is so indicative of their habits and instincts, their social chattering and loud gossip one with another, with their occasional disputes and quarrels, which one fancies one can almost interpret, the merry glance or cunning peer of their eye, and the occasional, but still cautious, impudence with which they appear to disregard you, are all pleasing adjuncts, though no doubt they may be hindrances, in a rural walk. On this morning the red-breast, undaunted by the step of man, broke out into his brief warble on the spray; now and then a blackbird, scared by the approaching foot, would dart from the concealing brake, and with his rapid note skim along the hedge, and in an instant be lost again among its branches. Here and there the shy fieldfares, no longer the birds of song* in our wintry season, were perched on the top of some lofty elm or ash, eyeing with apparent indifference one's near approach, and then with instinctive apprehension scudding off to more distant security. In a ploughed field by the lane-side a flock of graceful plovers were careering with their outstretched wings, and occasionally exhibiting their upturned white breasts, and uttering that plaintive sound, which almost bespeaks

* Sir C. Anderson, in his "Eight Weeks' Journal in Norway," says, "The fieldfares by hundreds answered each other in full song a wild but pleasant melody, between that of the storm-cock and song-thrush."

compassion, and would disarm all but a sportsman's zeal. Once, too, a solitary partridge sprung upon its whirring wing, as though an enemy had crossed its path, and was soon lost from sight by an intervening knoll. A windmill, too, that was whirling its rapid sails on my right attracted for a time my notice; and I stopped for a few moments to look at, aye, and admire the hurrying revolutions of its somewhat clumsy and perilous-looking apparatus. Its associations as connected with busy industry and the food of man may be interesting, but still a windmill is not a picturesque object in a landscape; and Northamptonshire especially abounds, or used to abound, in such ungainly structures. And yet one could not help thinking what an immense stride Christian civilization had taken, since the day that our blessed Lord sketched the picture that must have so often met His eyes, of "two women grinding at the mill." No doubt it was a vast improvement when man arrested the wind and the water to perform the toilsome tasks which earlier ages assigned to woman, as the drudge of man's will; and, ere long, steam will sweep away the last vestige of the cumbrous windmill, as too precarious and uncertain for the rapid demands of modern intellect and go-a-head-ism.

Amused and interested by these different objects and reflections, I at length reached the Lodge. It presented nothing beyond the usual range of farmhouses of that date of building, and parsimony of ar-

rangement: but there is always something peculiarly animating in the scene of a farm-yard. The flail in the barn, that gladsome music to a farmer's ear, and, at the time I am speaking of, not superseded by the more rapid accomplishment of the thrashing machine or the steam-engine, was busy in its whirling evolutions; the cattle in the fold seemed to enjoy the shelter and the food so carefully provided for them; and many a cackling hen was busy scratching for the hidden grain, while their pompous mate was strutting by their side, looking with much complacency on his obedient train, or calling some more favoured one to his side to point out some dainty morsel or grain he had descried, and which he instantly devoured himself with that peculiar chuckle, which seemed to say in modern slang, "Don't you wish you may get it?" Everything told of man's protection repaying in slight degree the care and bounty which he himself experienced from the beneficent Creator of all. I had however but little time to indulge in reflections, for Mr. Eveling, senior, had espied me, as I crossed the causeway leading to his house, and was already by my side, expressing in hearty simple language his pleasure at the visit. I accepted his invitation into the house, and there found his daughter-in-law busied in her varied occupations, but with instant readiness preparing the best seat in the little parlour, while the old gentleman, with that familiarity to which age gives so graceful a title, was already at my side, enter-

ing into the details of his farm. His son was gone to one of the neighbouring markets, and his absence seemed to call upon the father for a double portion of his attentions.

I soon took an opportunity of expressing the gratification I had felt at seeing the family at church on the preceding Sabbath, and spoke of him, "the friend of GOD," whose praise has been recorded by Almighty lips as one who would "command his children and his household after him, that they should keep the way of the Lord." The old man's eye glistened as I spoke; but he simply said that he thanked GOD he was yet spared to get to the house of GOD; and he added,

"The weather must be bad which keeps me away. If I live till next April, I shall be fourscore; and I think I may say, since I knew right from wrong, I have not absented myself from church fourscore times: and that you know, sir, must imply a very large amount of the blessing of health, as well as Christian privilege, for which I have much reason to be thankful."

"Yes," I replied, "if you began the practice as early as you have trained your grandchildren, you have enjoyed many a blessed year of Sabbath-days alone. Upwards of ten years of Sabbath-days have been allotted to you—a gracious provision for the soul. And yet how many excuse themselves for their neglect in going to church, on the plea of want of

time! They are so busy, Mr. Eveling, with their farm and their merchandise, their piece of land and their yoke of oxen, that they never think beyond them."

"Aye, sir," replied Mr. Eveling, "I well remember how astonished I was when my father once told me —I was but a slip of a thing then, and yet I remember it as if it was but yesterday—at the end of seven weeks I had had 'a whole week of Sundays;' and he then added, 'If you see seven years more, you will have had a whole year of Sabbaths; and if you come to threescore years and ten, you will then have had ten years of Sabbath-days alone.' I never forgot that; and now that I am come to fourscore, I do believe that is one reason why I do not find my years to be labour and sorrow."

"No doubt, Mr. Eveling, no doubt. Earthly Sabbaths are a blessed preparation for a heavenly and eternal Sabbath; as neglected ones run up a heavy score against us, when those days come in which we shall have no pleasure in them: nor have I any doubt that the quietude and repose of the Sabbath, and the cessation for four-and-twenty hours of the week's usual harassing and disturbing cares, with that placid enjoyment of holier pleasures which it insures, has a very material influence, even on the outward frame and body. And if it be true that

'A Sabbath well spent
Brings a week of content,'

I think we may extend the privilege, and say that a youth of piety and devotion is a sure and sweet preparation for an old age of ease and tranquillity."

Mrs. Eveling here remarked—

"Father never thinks the week goes well unless it begins well, and he likes to accustom the little ones betimes to go to church."

"He is quite right, and his practice is but an illustration of the truth I alluded to in the case of Abraham, that a man who himself loves and fears GOD will rule his children and his household after him, that they too should keep the way of the Lord." I then turned to the grandfather, and said, "From your own practice, Mr. Eveling, as well as what I heard you repeat just now as an observation of your father's, I can well believe that he was a man fearing GOD and serving Him. I see it exemplified in yourself, and I see it exemplified also in the way in which, when you are gone to your rest, a future generation will tread in your steps. How earnestly do I wish that all parents would consider the vast influence their own example has on the conduct of those around them; for how seldom do we find the children of a Sabbath-breaking father or mother walking in other steps than those in which their parents have trodden!"

"It is quite true," he answered, "we have a saying in this country, 'Where old ducks fly, young ducks follow;' but," he added, with a sigh, "I do not think

it always true that a Sabbath-keeping parent sees his children following his steps; I wish it were."

"Possibly not, though there may have been errors and inconsistencies in those parents' conduct to account for this; but even with the occasional or I fear it may be frequent exception, the rule is too valuable, the blessing too precious, the privilege too great to be easily surrendered; and I therefore rejoiced to see even the youngest of your children, Mrs. Eveling, accompanying you to the house of GOD."

"Why, sir," was the mother's reply, "if I did not bring it, I should be obliged to stay at home myself; and a very little management keeps it quiet."

"It is, I really believe," I replied, "a mistaken notion that children are ever too young to appreciate the solemnities of religious worship. They may not, I allow, comprehend its meaning, but they imbibe somewhat at least of its holy awe; and their early attendance at the sanctuary, and the impression there made on them through the medium of their outward senses, prepare the mind for the reception of those holy truths which cannot be implanted too early. If, as we are told in Scripture, 'as soon as they be born, they go astray, speaking lies,' we cannot begin too soon to instil the contrary lessons of holy truth. And as I saw your little children with their uplifted hands, I could not but repeat to myself, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise.' It would be a sad mistake to con-

vert the Lord's blessings into curses, or, at least, into hindrances; and parents are too apt to make children an excuse for their own absence from the house of GOD. Surely," I added, "it would never have been said that 'happy is the man that hath his quiver full' of such arrows, if every additional arrow in that quiver was necessarily an obstacle in the road to heaven."

At this moment one of the little children put her rosy cheek within the door, and, calling her to me, I placed her on my knee, and asked her if she had ever seen me before. She was too bashful to reply, but I saw that she remembered me, for she shrunk not from the kiss I imprinted on her little cheek, and seemed pleased while I played with the curling locks which clustered over her brow and hung upon her neck.

"This little girl of yours, Mrs. Eveling," I said, "reminds me of a text of Scripture, 'I will guide thee with mine eye,' she seems so docile and obedient to the slightest beck. There are indeed children, and children too of a larger growth, who will not regard the intimation of the eye, and must be held in with bit and bridle; and there are some to whom an uplifted finger is enough. It is the *habit* of obedience—it is the *principle* of surrendering their own wishes to those of their parents, which cannot be inculcated too early, or persevered in too steadily; and, though I am no advocate for sparing the rod, if necessity required it, I am persuaded that it need seldom

or ever be resorted to. A look of sorrow in a parent's face for a child's misconduct speaks more loudly than an angry tone; and to go with the offending little one on your own bended knees before a throne of grace, and ask of GOD pardon for its faults, is more likely to bring conviction to your child, and more certain to soothe your own spirit."

I had in some degree become acquainted with Mr. Eveling's previous history before I made my visit, and I was anxious to lead him to the subject, not from any intrusive feeling of curiosity, but, I trust, from higher and purer motives of contributing that consolation which a review of GOD'S dealings with ourselves and others, and a reference in all things to higher wisdom and surer mercy than our own, must ever afford. And indeed I have ever found that to lead a man to speak of his own trials and misfortunes, and to lend a patient and a listening ear to the detail, is not only a safety-valve for the high-pressure feeling of deep and intense grief, but, next to pouring out those sorrows into the ear of GOD, is the most consolatory relief which human sympathy could devise. So I observed,

"You have not been long a tenant of this farm, I understand, Mr. Eveling?"

The old man shook his head mournfully, while he replied,

"No, sir, not long; but GOD'S will be done!"

"It *is* done," I said, "when that expression comes

from the heart in sincerity and faith. GOD'S will is done—His purpose of mercy accomplished, when man's will meekly resigns itself to His, and replies under every dispensation and every trial, 'It is well;' and it brings too its own reward, for in the words of the hymn,

> 'Sweet in the confidence of faith
> To trust His firm decrees;
> Sweet to lie passive in His hand,
> And know no will but His.'

Every man, I should think, Mr. Eveling, on summing up the Lord's dealings with himself, would find mercies more abundant than afflictions, if he fairly cast up the account. But the child of GOD, even though he may have gone through the hottest furnace, can be at no loss, because sanctified trials are in reality the sweetest mercies and the surest blessings."

But as the rest of our conversation would hardly be intelligible, unless I afforded to my readers the advantage which I myself possessed, I will devote the following chapter to a brief detail of the principal incidents of Mr. Eveling's previous life.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Eveling had early in life succeeded his father in a substantial freehold farm of ample acres. Indeed I could trace his name in our parochial registers, as a family of some repute in their own respected sphere among the yeomanry of England, or, as they are called in our more northern counties, the statesmen of the land, to a very distant date. With the property, he inherited also his father's respectability and good habits, and enjoyed all that regard and influence among his neighbours, which property, integrity, and industry must ever produce: and all looked on Mr. Eveling as a flourishing, upright man, who not only merited, but, rarer still, enjoyed every one's good opinion. His workmen were all men of sober, steady character. To be a labourer under Mr. Eveling stamped a man with respectability, as it was well known that he never allowed any deviations from sobriety or regularity: and it was a rule as rigid as a Median or a Persian law, that every one employed under him should attend Divine worship once at least every Sabbath-day: and his shepherd, like the Patriarch of Salisbury Plain, was as punctual in his observance of the time, as either the minister or the clerk. It was often in his mouth, "like master, like man," and he was fully aware that to insure

such habits, his own conduct must be consistent, and he scrupulously avoided exacting any duty on that day which could by possibility be avoided; and even some things which might have been looked upon with a lenient eye he forbore to insist upon, from a reverential fear of putting a stumbling-block in a brother's way. Many of his brother-farmers at first ridiculed his preciseness, predicted his ruin, and envied his success; for, somehow or other, when all ought to have gone wrong, everything went right; and it was ere long acknowledged, that, contrary to all the usual rules of human arithmetic, six days' labour was more profitable than seven.

Mr. Eveling had married shortly after his father's death, and an increasing family grew up around him, consisting of three sons and a daughter. During their childhood nothing occurred to interrupt the prosperity which attended his fortunes. But, with all his personal integrity and love of righteous dealing, and even with his high sense of responsibility, Mr. Eveling was a good-natured, easy man, and, like the aged judge of Israel, was more pained to witness and hear of the misconduct of his sons, than studious to control or check them. It is probable he knew not the full extent of their misdoings, especially of the eldest; for Mrs. Eveling was unfortunately a partial mother, and often concealed those errors and their consequences, which real love would have led her to condemn and to disclose, if she could not her-

self repress them. Be this, however, as it may, his eldest soon became a thorn in his side, and addicted himself to society and habits which marred the harmony and happiness of the once peaceful and flourishing home.

It was an unfortunate circumstance that Eveling Lodge was in the neighbourhood of the P——y Hunt. I am not foolish enough, in such a tale as the present, to enter on a crusade against the sports of English gentlemen; but the keenest follower of the chase, if he reflect but a moment on the adjuncts of such an establishment, will acknowledge that they are not in general favourable to the promotion of morality, industry, or decency of the rural population, among whom they are unhappily placed. A large retinue of grooms and stable-boys attendant on the members of the hunt, many of whom come from a distance and tarry out the season, with the minor shoal of earth-stoppers, dog-feeders, "*et id omne genus*," whose principal residence or resort is the public-house, and whose language is just that popular dash of slang, knowingness, humour, and assumption of superiority, with a sprinkling of profaneness, which so unhappily attracts the young, and wins their imitation, that one hardly wonders that such assume a sway over the more usual characters that congregate there, and almost inevitably inoculate the whole neighbourhood, and in too many an instance diffuse the evil of their lax morality, in the bold con-

fidence that in a short time they shall be too far away to answer for their misdeeds. I at least can say that, as the minister of a rural parish in such a neighbourhood, I have had cause to mourn over the demoralization caused by the vicinity of such an establishment, and have seen ruin, shame, misery, and early death among its baneful consequences. With all humility for my own ignorance on the subject, it does not, I confess, seem to me necessarily connected with the legitimate pleasures arising from the sport, that the establishment should be such a nucleus of so much that is destructive and wrong. One is generally apt to associate with the character of the fox-hunter much that is frank, and generous, and open-hearted; but, though I can rejoice that the days of Squire Western are exploded, I am not sure that the broader and coarser features of such a period are compensated by the more polished, but more heartless, foppery,—the more refined, but more pernicious, practices of Melton or Pytchley. I speak not now of the extravagant outlay of such establishments, the almost princely and sumptuous mode in which, in some establishments at least, every arrangement is made for the comforts and convenience and well-keeping of the animals, on whom they are dependent for amusement,—the untiring vigilance with which they are almost nursed and tended,—the accuracy, minuteness, and regardlessness of expense, with which shelter and warmth, and cleanliness and ventilation,

clothing and food, nay, luxury itself is bestowed on the irrational animal, while the poor, almost houseless, peasant, by whose sweat and labour, and the sinews of whose arms, the very magnificence of these establishments is in some measure maintained, is in too many an instance left unheeded and uncared for —in a habitation, or what is deemed sufficient for such, which admits of no separation of age or sex, which provides for no decency or comfort, and would be rejected as utterly unfitted for the hound or horse. But this belongs to a class of grievances with which this humble narrative has nothing to do; but as assuredly as GOD heard the cry of His afflicted people from the furnaces and brick-kilns of Egypt, so will the cry of our oppressed poor arise out of the depths of their misery into the ears of the Lord of hosts.

To return, however, from this digression. Young Harry Eveling was no unfrequent associate of the huntsman, whippers-in, and grooms of this establishment; and, his position in society and his father's means enabling him to be well-mounted, he often mingled in the field; and as sport, for the time at least, levels ranks, his bold riding, frank demeanour, and youthful vivacity soon made him an acceptable acquaintance at the cover-side, and conferred on him the somewhat questionable privilege of riding side by side, and sometimes ahead of my Lord This and Sir Something That. A few clever dealings too in horseflesh gained him the appellation of a knowing one,

and, ere the father was at all aware of the extent of the mischief, Harry Eveling was ruined for a farmer, and his propensities turned into another current than that of tilling the ground or superintending labourers. His days were principally spent with the peer or the squire in the hunting-field, and his nights with the valet or the groom in the public-house. His father, unconscious indeed of much that was going on—for all liked Master Harry too well to convey unwelcome intelligence home, and his mother too effectually screened the little that did reach—could not, however, be blind to the change that was taking place in his son's habits and ideas; and in the vain hope that responsibility would entail steadiness, and business induce industry, most unwisely took a farm for him in his own neighbourhood, and as he thought under his own eye, and as he hoped under his own control. It might have been expected that the son would have objected to such an arrangement, but he saw in it only the opportunities of greater indulgence and less restraint, and closed so readily with the proposition that his father believed he was in earnest, and exulted in the hope that he would now take steadily and perseveringly to business. The result, however, was such as might have been anticipated from the measure, and only gave a more rapid impulse to his career. Removed even from the slight checks of home, he ran a headlong course of extravagance and dissipation; and though his father's am-

ple means for a time averted the downfal, it came at last, and one portion of the freehold was disposed of to extricate his son from the consequences of his thoughtless and vicious indulgences. Much harm, however, was not yet done in a worldly point of view; and though a father's estimate of a child's misconduct differs widely from that of the world,—for while the one sighs, the other laughs,—yet the doors of a forgiving parent were soon opened to the returning prodigal.

The lesson, however, had not been lost upon the old man; and in the disposal of his second son he determined to obviate the mischief which his previous precipitancy had occasioned. He bound him to a tradesman in the county town; and, as William Eveling evinced habits of industry and attention to business, he comforted himself with the reflection that in this step he had acted wisely. In process of time the apprenticeship expired, and Mr. Eveling was induced by the son, and the zealous advocacy of his mother, to advance a sum of money to establish him in trade on his own account. For a time all seemed to flourish, and every one spoke of the success and increasing fortunes of the young tradesman. He married, but unhappily a young and handsome wife encouraged ideas of expenditure, which were soon found incompatible with the enlargement of business and the claims of a rising family. Difficulties ensued, but with those difficulties no change of living occurred;

and speculation and the fatal system of bill-drawing were resorted to, in order to supply the slower but surer gains of conscientious and regular trading. Mr. Eveling was about the last to suspect or know the heavy blow that was impending: he saw only the flourishing exterior, and heard only the statements of extended business, accompanied, it is true, with complaints of want of capital at a moment so important to his welfare. In an evil hour Mr. Eveling was persuaded to become security for his son to a large amount at the county bank; and, by way of security to himself, had assigned to him an interest in the profits of the trade—a fatal step, which soon involved him as a partner in the bankruptcy which speedily followed.

Another and by far the larger portion of the freehold was now sold. But the old man murmured not; he was only anxious that no slur should attach to his name, that no one should speak evil of his integrity, and that the cause of religious profession should not be wounded through his side, and he paid every farthing for which he and his son were legally or in honour bound. His means were now curtailed within very scanty limits indeed, but he at once adapted himself to the narrow fortune, to which GOD in His all-wise dispensations had reduced him, and with the aid of his younger son he continued to till the few acres which still remained to him of his once ample farm. His eldest son, wearied perhaps of the re-

straints of the parental home, or, it may have been, ashamed of continuing a burden on his father's narrowed means, had some short time before quitted him, and, it was supposed, was gaining a livelihood in some humble servitude in or near the metropolis; and some considerable time elapsed ere he was again heard of.

Poverty, however, did not bring with it its usual and bitterest sting—the neglect and scorn of those who had known him in his brighter days of fortune. Respect and regard still followed his footsteps wherever he went; and, though he no longer hired the labourer, or could bestow the kindness of earlier days, the hat was still touched as he passed, and every eye apparently looked with sympathy on the unmurmuring submission with which the old man bowed to the decrees of Providence, and every tongue spoke with admiration of the undeviating tenderness and devotion with which his youngest son clung to his father's side, and by his industry upheld their fallen fortunes.

It was during this period of comparative quietness and seclusion that death entered his dwelling, and removed from him the now aged partner of his sorrows. As a mother she had been indeed indiscreet, but as a wife irreproachable; and the widowed survivor deeply mourned her loss, not so much to the outward gaze, as in the innermost recesses of his own heart. His views respecting death had been and perhaps were peculiar, at least such as were shared with

but few. He had always spoken of it as a season of rejoicing, and so far from calling it "the king of terrors," he would designate it as "the herald of peace;" and many a time, in his own familiar illustration, he would speak of it as "giving up work and returning home," or, in the words of his favourite Flavel, he would say, "Living time is *labouring* time; dying time is *harvest* time."* But, when death really came, and removed from his side one who had so long shared every feeling of his heart, and with whom he had walked hand in hand through the brightness as well as the gloominess of the valley, he felt that, whatever "dying time" might be to the departing pilgrim, it could not be otherwise than sorrowing time to the survivor, and that his own steps were enfeebled by the withdrawal even of the earthly staff on which he had leaned so long. But death is so especially the work of Him without whom not even a sparrow nor the tiniest speck of life is withdrawn from existence,—there is so evidently heard in the chamber of dissolution the impressive but consolatory words, "Be still, and know that I am GOD,"—that even while the tears are constrained to fall, the heart of a child of GOD can break forth into a blessing on the name of Him who in love gave, and who in equal love takes away.

But his trials were not yet over; and in the in-

* It was a saying among the Egyptians, "To rest is sweeter than work, to sleep is sweeter than watching, and to die is sweeter than living."

scrutable wisdom of Almighty love his faith was yet to be made perfect through deeper suffering. Though misfortunes had thickly clustered over his declining years, though folly and extravagance had marked his children's career, disgrace and crime, as the world judges of them, had never overtaken them. Alas! that sting, the iron of that sorrow, was yet to enter into his soul. His eldest son, whom I have mentioned as supposed to have been gaining his livelihood in some humble capacity in the metropolis, and of whom no tidings had been heard for a considerable time, again made his appearance. At first indeed his visits were short, but after each the old man was generally found dejected and in tears. Once more he came, and was observed to enter his father's house with a haggard countenance and a hasty step; he looked around, as he opened the door, and it was instantly closed. What occurred during that interview was never known; not a word ever escaped the old man's lips in reference to it; but the servant-girl, as she passed the door of the room in which they were, heard the father's voice in stifled sobs. The son shortly after left the house, and the next morning the old man was seen to ride slowly and dejectedly to the neighbouring town, and it was soon known that Farmer Eveling's last acres were to be consigned to the hammer. The truth indeed could not be long concealed; and though the particular circumstances were never clearly ascertained, yet enough transpired to indicate

that a forgery had been committed, and that, to save his son from an ignominious fate, the father had surrendered all he had.

The home of his fathers was now to be left, and probably this was the keenest pang of all, or rather it brought home to his feelings all the painful bitterness of the past with a keener edge. Till now, something had remained which told of happier days: he had parted with his land, not indeed without a sigh, and had seen it pass into the hand of strangers; but the roof of his forefathers still rose before him, and he felt that he was not altogether fortuneless nor forsaken. But now all was to be foregone, and, for a moment, a complaint almost arose in his heart, as if the decree had gone forth in anger, and he had cleansed his heart in vain. With the perplexed Psalmist he was tempted to exclaim, "This is too hard for me;" or with the patriarch, "All these things are against me." But, though tried, he was not forsaken: the arrows of the Almighty had indeed fallen fast and thick upon his aged head—billow upon billow, and storm upon storm. He might have said, as one said before him, "All thy waves are gone over me;" and so indeed they had—they *had* gone *over* him, and rolled onwards, not one had overwhelmed him. He still opposed the shield of faith against all assaults: and there was One, mightier even than his faith, the loving Intercessor, who had prayed for him that his faith might not fail, and in that strength he

stood. The furnace was indeed hot wherein he was tried, and who wonders, or rather who would not wonder, if, when the gold was melted, some dross exhibited itself also. I suspect there are few of the children of men who have come out of the furnace of affliction, who have not need to lay their heads very low in the dust before the mighty Purifier.

If, however, sympathy had been excited for his previous sorrows, this last blow, so unexpected and so painful, gave even a tone of tenderness and affection to the attentions which met him on every side. His youngest son still adhered in fond and clinging love to his father's side, and had compensated, as far as his efforts could, for the misconduct of his brothers. And in such estimation was he held, that a lady in the neighbourhood, with a feeling of benevolence that did honour to her heart, offered him a vacant farm, and the loan of a sum of money to stock it, that he might be enabled to afford his father refuge for his declining years. It was thankfully accepted, and thither did the desolate family retire. It was still within the parish, though at some distance from his former home; a circumstance at which probably the old man rejoiced, as the sight of its old chimneys and its gable ends could have awakened only saddening recollections. The son strove with unwearied industry, rose early, and late took rest; and of them both it might be said that they ate the bread of carefulness. When prosperity, in the usual acceptation of

the word, had been their lot, they had never neglected their GOD nor His ordinances; and now in the day of their adversity they still remembered Him.

On the first Sabbath after he had quitted the home of his forefathers, the old man did heave a sigh as he left his new habitation to attend the services of the day. He remembered the family pew, where he had so long sate, and from whence his eye had exercised undisputed dominion over the younger and less reverent portion of the congregation. He was now to pass it by; and the bitterness of the past once more thrilled through his heart. It was not indeed the last straw on the camel's back; but, though he knew not, and in all probability had never heard of the story, as the unhappy Egyptian monarch of old felt, who saw with unmoistened eye his daughter in the dress and doomed to the fate of a captive, and gazed with unmoved look on his son led forth to execution; but who burst into tears, as he beheld one, whom he had long known in affluence and splendour, soliciting alms in the squalid dress of a beggar;—so house and land, and independence and station, were all surrendered, I do not say, in stoicism or in apathy, but in Christian submission, and with an equanimity that never thought of a murmur. But now the simple incident of his own pew to be resigned, and all the feelings and associations connected with it—"its pride of place" and, what was far more dear than all, its wonted nook of prayer—gave him more real pain and

uneasiness than every other sacrifice; and he afterwards owned that he had scarcely closed his eyes during the whole of the preceding Saturday night.

Mr. Eveling, however, entered the church with his usual serious demeanour; and if dejection could be traced on his features, it held divided sway with that solemn air of devotion which had ever marked him. A surprise, however, awaited him, through the kind and delicate intervention of his minister and neighbours. As he passed along the aisle, the clerk stood at the opened door of his old seat, ready to invite him in. His eye had been averted, as if he would not allow his mind to be interrupted, and he did not at first see him; but, as he was about to pass, he was stopped by a gentle tug at his coat, and with silent gesture invited to his old domain. The scene was worthy of a painter's hand,—the tall, lank figure of the clerk with his long flaxen hair, and almost patronizing smile on his lips, while a tear quivered in his eye, was strongly contrasted with the deep and almost convulsive motion which agitated the old man's countenance. But the intention could not be mistaken; there was his own Prayer-book, as usual, on the ledge of the seat; the Bible, out of which he had so many Sabbaths read GOD'S word, lay by its side; even the old and worn-out hassock, on which he had so long knelt, was again in its place. He at once guessed and understood all the delicacy of the act. As soon as he entered, he sank upon his knees,

and as he arose, every trace of the deep emotion that had agitated him had subsided into his usual calm and reverential demeanour. From that hour his possession was undisturbed, and in that pew it was that I saw him and his family on the Sunday preceding the visit mentioned in the last chapter.

CHAPTER III.

It will not be supposed that the details narrated in the preceding chapter were all known to me at the period of my first visit, as accurately as they were afterwards. Many of them, in fact, were elicited in various conversations from Mr. Eveling himself; though, at the time to which I am now alluding, I had that general knowledge of his previous life, which seemed to justify my giving to our conversation the tone which it afterwards assumed.

And I am the more anxious to perpetuate our conversation, unpretending though it be, because I have often found the Lord's dealings with His people a sad stumbling-block; not so much to those who are the subjects of them, though they frequently err in their view, as to those who stand aloof, as it were, and see from their own more unassailed shelter the peltings of the storm on some apparently defenceless brother or sister's head. It has given rise in many an in-

stance, not only to "charging GOD foolishly" with unkindness and injustice, but to arraigning the objects of these dispensations before the bar of their own limited reason and unkind suspicion, as if they were suffering the retributive penalty of some hidden sin, on the same principle as that on which the inhabitants of Melita charged Paul with being a murderer, when the poisonous reptile fastened on his hand. It is no new feature in the unkindness of the human heart—it is no novel inquiry—"Who ever perished being innocent? and when were the righteous cut off?" From the days of the man of Uz to the present time, it has been ever so; and though no truth is more repeatedly inculcated in the Bible than that tribulation, yea, and great tribulation, is the appointed portion of the saints of GOD, yet no sooner does tribulation arrive than all the unkind croakers around insinuate this and that as the ground-work of GOD's dealings with them, and that in very judgment and wrath He has afflicted them. No doubt we must still say of all GOD's dispensations and trials, "Clouds and darkness are round about them." Nor will the veil be thoroughly withdrawn till death has removed it from our eyes. "What I do thou knowest not now," is the limit here; "but thou shalt know hereafter," is the upholding promise even in the depths of the billows.

It was therefore with some anxiety that I said to Mr. Eveling, in continuation of our conversation,

"I am afraid, as a comparative stranger, you may think me intrusive in making such remarks, but I am not utterly a stranger to your character or trials; and yet," I added, "if it distress you—"

"Oh no, no," he interrupted me, "it does me good to talk of the past, and I have no wish for concealment; nearly fourscore years have passed over me, and I bless GOD that He has carried me through, so that I have no need to be ashamed to look any man in the face. I wish it were the same towards GOD, but *there, there*, I have need to lay myself very low in the dust. But—"

He here paused, and turning to his daughter-in-law said, "Mary, my dear, you had better take little Lucy away; she must be getting wearisome to you, sir."

His daughter took the hint, and, relieving me from my little friend, withdrew from the room and left us alone.

"You were saying, sir," began Mr. Eveling, "that you knew something of my history. It is, I believe, in its main circumstances pretty well known. I have always lived in this parish, as my father did before me: I was born in it, and have lived in it ever since; and here I hope, with the Lord's will, to end my days, and, like old Barzillai, to be buried by the side of my father and my mother. And my neighbours have been always very kind to me,—far more," he smiled and said, "than fallen fortunes usually find."

"Our Lord indeed, Mr. Eveling, said that a pro-

phet had no honour in his own country, but you are so far an exception to the rule, that assuredly all speak kindly, nay, affectionately of you; and it is no doubt one of the appointed consolatory mitigations of your trials, that your integrity is unimpeached and acknowledged by all."

"I hope it is,—I hope it is," was his earnest reply; "but it is no undervaluing of human sympathy or neighbourly kindness to say, that, if that had been all, even to the extent I have met with it, it would have been but a poor reed of Egypt, a sorry staff to have leaned on in the wilderness of the Lord's trials."

"I feel that, Mr. Eveling," I said; "but still human sympathy is a gift from GOD, and, as such, to be received. 'When a man's ways please the Lord,' it is said, 'He maketh his enemies to be at peace with him;' and looking at it as such, as a providential ingredient to sweeten the cup of bitterness, it becomes not only a lawful but an augmented consolation to receive that sympathy as from the hand of GOD."

"I fully acknowledge that I have indeed felt it as such in all the fulness of its comfort; and yet there have been times when, no doubt ungratefully, I have been tempted to exclaim of all human props, 'Miserable comforters are ye all.'"

"I could understand that," I said, "if these human comforters drew their topics of consolation from human sources; but surely when they refer you to

GOD'S word as the clue, and to GOD'S treasury as the store-house, and to GOD'S Spirit as the Comforter and guide, and to GOD'S Son as the pattern and example,—such a counsellor, one would think, Mr. Eveling, would be welcomed in a different spirit."

"Assuredly," was the answer, "but I have often found my counsellors applying, as it were, buttresses to a tottering wall, and those buttresses as unsafe and tottering as the wall itself, 'daubing it with untempered mortar,' as the prophet says. And even were it otherwise, there are sorrows, as well as seasons, in which, as the heart alone knoweth its own bitterness, so can it alone find refuge in solitary communion with GOD. I have been at times, sir, sorely tried, far more than the world knows; and I have found one hour of solitude in my own chamber on my knees far better worth than the kindness of friends or the sympathy of relatives; when indeed the presence even of the dearest and the nearest would have been a burden to me; when the heart alone knew its own bitterness, and felt how far beyond all of earth was the sympathy of Him, who was in all points tempted like as we are, and could therefore Himself be so thoroughly touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

"I am not disposed to disagree with you, Mr. Eveling," I said, "and, though I have not been myself so severely disciplined in the school of affliction as you have been, I know how good it is to com-

mune with our own heart in one's chamber and be still!"

"Ah, sir, there was an hour—oh! what an hour was that!—when in anguish almost as deep as hers, who became a widow and a mother on the same day, and whose heart and life died within her, when she heard that the ark of GOD was taken, I too exclaimed, 'Ichabod, Ichabod!' *My* glory had indeed departed, shame had fallen on my house and name, and Satan was busy within me, like Job's wife with her tried and smitten husband. I hardly knew what I was about, my very senses seemed to fail, a mist and thick darkness gathered before my eyes, and my heart felt heavier than a lump of lead. I almost mechanically took up my Bible, and I opened it at the 13th Psalm. I shall never forget the agonizing thought that was darted into my mind, as I read the first verse or two,

"'How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?'

"It seemed as if I had opened the book to read that GOD had forgotten me. I instinctively fell upon my knees, and it was as though the words of the hymn were instantly realized, that

> 'Satan trembles when he sees
> The weakest saint upon his knees,'

and light was poured in upon my darkness. Like David, I began in sorrow and complaint, and like him, I ended with thanksgiving and praise. Yes!" he continued, reverentially lifting up his hands and eyes, "Thou, Lord, girdedst me with strength to the war."

"No doubt, Mr. Eveling," I replied, "the great secret of all strength, as of all blessedness, is in the Lord; and that this, His secret, is with them that fear Him. David, you remember, unites the two, when he says, 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee.'"

"It is indeed a secret," replied the old man, "which no eye of curiosity can penetrate. We may say of it, in the words of the Psalmist, "He maketh darkness His secret place"—"His way is in the sea, and His path in the deep waters, and His footsteps are not known."

"And yet, Mr. Eveling, the eye of faith can read its lines. To the eye of reason or of science it is as unintelligible as the hand-writing on the walls of the Babylonian monarch's palace to the seers and sages of Chaldæa; but I doubt not you have deciphered what the Lord has written on every trial and dispensation with which He has visited you."

"I was a long time in making it out, though. At first I read it, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right;' but that only made me submissive, and tribulation worked patience only.

"My next reading was, 'Shall we receive good at the hands of GOD, and shall we not receive evil also?' Experience, no doubt, testified to the truth of that, and so I had advanced a step from patience to experience.

"But that did not satisfy, and I read again; and then I saw written, as it were on a rainbow round about GOD's throne, 'There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of GOD.' Then, indeed, came hope, 'a hope that maketh not ashamed'—and with hope joy, and 'I rejoiced in the hope of the glory of GOD.' All the sufferings of the present life seemed but light afflictions, in comparison of the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which GOD has laid up in store for them that love Him. I saw sin pardoned, GOD reconciled, and, as old Flavel says, 'in every cross Jesus bearing the heaviest end;' and such love of GOD was shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost, that I have ever since gone on my way rejoicing.'"

"You have, indeed, Mr. Eveling," I said, "given a very accurate description of the Christian pilgrim's journey, far beyond the imperfect type so often presented to us of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. They indeed at length passed over Jordan, and set their feet on the long-promised land; but what awaited them even there? conflicts, and battles, and bloodshed, and heart-burnings, and dissensions, and sin, and sorrow, and GOD's wrath—a poor 'rest' for

the people of GOD! In our Canaan there will be no conflict, no battle,—for the last enemy, Death, will have been destroyed; no bloodshed, for 'having entered into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, He hath by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' There will be no heart-burnings, no disputes, for 'GOD is love' will be the everlasting chorus of heaven; no sin, no wrath, for into that place can enter nothing that defileth."

"It is even so," he replied, "all here tells us we have no abiding city—all here warns us to seek one to come; and happy he, who, forgetting the sorrows and the trials he has left behind, or rather making them as stepping-stones for his future progress, presses onwards to his perfect and eternal rest."

My visit had now lasted a considerable time, and so, shortly after engaging in prayer together, I would have wished Mr. Eveling good-bye; but he insisted on accompanying me part of the way home—a proposition to which I gladly assented.

Our walk was more tortuous than the way I had come to the Lodge, for Mr. Eveling would lead me to this and to that point of his farm; and, though winter is not a peculiarly favourable season for agricultural details, there was still much to interest. For instance, in one field we went up to an old mole-catcher, who was busy setting his traps for those little animals, who had already begun to burrow their subterranean path among the young wheat. As he

saw the man in the distance, and drew nearer towards him, Mr. Eveling said to me,

"That's old Will Holt, sir; I've known him man and boy for more than seventy years; he is two or three years younger than I am, and his father was a labourer of my father's, and I think father and son together have worked more than a century for us both. He's a fine old specimen of the English labourer, such at least as he was, for I don't think we've many like him now. He and I are the two old weather-beaten veterans of the parish."

"Old Will" was indeed, to the outward gaze, a venerable relic. He had been upwards of six feet high in his youth, but age and labour and rheumatism had considerably bent his back and diminished his stature, though at times and for a few moments he would draw himself up to his full height. Unlike his master, his hair was silvery white, and, though his forehead was bald, his locks behind hung down some considerable way. His eye was still bright, and he always looked one full in the face, when he spoke or was spoken to, though without the slightest tincture of rudeness or disrespect. Sturdy, honest independence was marked on every furrow, and I said,

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Eveling, that 'old Will,' as you call him, is a fine specimen of a race now nearly extinct, and I should like, some of these days, to know your opinion as to the causes of this

deterioration of our English peasantry. No doubt, as one of the old school, you can at least tell the relationship in which farmer and labourer once stood towards each other; and, as an observer of times, you must have witnessed the gradual change, and most probably noted the causes."

"It is true, I have both seen and mourned over the change, and perhaps I have thought I knew the reason; but I am afraid," he added, with a smile, "like most old men, I think the fathers wiser than their children."

"I have no doubt you do," I said, "and I suspect in this instance at least you are correct; at any rate, the children have failed in keeping what their fathers bequeathed them, and 'our bold peasantry, their country's pride,' no longer form a link in that chain which bound all together as members of the same body."

By this time we had reached the old mole-catcher; and, as his master came up, he raised himself from his stooping posture, and said,

"Well, master, this fine day, I see, puts us all on the move; the moles are out on their walks, as well as we."

"Aye, Will," replied his master, "and they have as sharp an enemy at their heels as we have, only you are not quite so skilful."

I did not at the moment catch the drift of Mr. Eveling's meaning; but Will was apparently quite

up to his master's mode of conversation, for he replied,

"No, master, I han't been so long at the work as he."

"That 's true, Will; he has been studying his craft for nearly six thousand years, reading the same book, and that 's the heart of man; and no wonder he knows all our runs, our paths, our weaknesses, and devices, as well as every sort of bait and trap."

I now, of course, saw Mr. Eveling's meaning; so I said,

"You have drawn a very useful lesson out of your poor friend's employment, Mr. Eveling; and if Solomon disdained not to bid the sluggard go to the ant for wisdom, you have invested the glossy mole with the power of preaching a very salutary sermon."

"Yes, your Reverence," said Will, "master has got a very shrewd way of putting a tongue into everything he sees. If I were to turn up a worm now, I dare say he 'd make it speak somewhat to the purpose."

"I dare say I should, Will," said his master, "and a very good sermon it could preach too," he added.

"And a very wise plan it is, Mr. Holt," I said. "It is not they only that go down to the sea in ships that see the wonders or trace the goodness of the Lord; they are visible in every field, and every furrow, every hedge-row, every ant and mole-hill; but," I added, "there is one difference between the enemy

of the mole and our enemy, and a very essential one it is. You, Mr. Holt, if you set your traps properly and in the right run, are sure to catch your prey. Our enemy has no such unerring power. There is God's everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and that covenant declares of all the Lord's people, that 'no one is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand.'"

The old man reverentially lifted up his hat and said, "Amen!"

Mr. Eveling did not apparently wish to continue the conversation longer, so merely giving Will a few directions as to his work, he proceeded with me on my road homewards. Our conversation naturally turned for a time on the old man we had just quitted, and I said,

"I was very much struck with the patriarchal appearance of your old labourer. I could almost picture to myself such a man walking at the head of his flock over the pastures of Palestine or the plains of Mesopotamia, when Abraham and Isaac dwelt in tents: I don't remember, however, seeing him at church on Sunday. I could hardly have missed noticing him. One old patriarchal head I remarked, but that, I was told, was old John Elliott, Mr. Abbott's shepherd. Will Holt, I am sure, could not have been amongst us."

"No," said Mr. Eveling, "he was not there; and yet old Will is a regular church-goer, more so than

most folks, and I'll be bound he didn't omit last Sunday."

"You speak riddles, Mr. Eveling."

"One that is easily solved, sir," was the reply. "You no doubt know, or, as you are a stranger among us, you may have heard of Mr. Jones?"

"Of Creaton?" I asked.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Of course," I replied, "I have heard of him; his praise is in all the churches."

"Well, Creaton is not many miles from us, about five or six; and—I hardly remember how many years ago, but more than a quarter of a century—Master Holt—we did not call him Old Will then—was led to hear Mr. Jones preach; and that faithful man of GOD so delivered his Master's message, and GOD'S Holy Spirit so sealed that message to poor Will's heart, that from that day, summer nor winter, he has never omitted attending Mr. Jones's ministry. Neither cold nor heat, nor rain nor snow, ever stops him. He leaves home early on the Sabbath morning, takes his little satchel of food in his pocket, and remains till the evening; and I believe during all that time he has never missed a single Sabbath.* Mr. Jones, I dare say, would sooner lose his clerk than the sight of old Will's white hairs."

"You interest me much by your account," I said, "and yet one would have thought his own parish

* A literal fact.

church would have had the first claim on his affection."

"One would have thought so, and so I once told Will that I feared he had itching ears; but he said that GOD in His mercy had made Mr. Jones the instrument of His conversion, and that his heart always kindled to the sound of his voice, as a child to its father's."

"Well," I said, "I should be sorry to disturb such a feeling, when, as in the present case, one can have no doubt that it is genuine. And yet such an arrangement, one cannot but fear, must have led to much omission of Sabbath duties at home and in his own household, and the neglect of which no motive can justify; but of course I know nothing, as yet, of Holt's family."

Mr. Eveling gave me no reply, so I continued,

"There is, no doubt, something sacred and touching in listening to the truth from those lips which first endeared that truth; and as the heart recurs with peculiar emotion and solemnity of feeling, even to the spot where it was first awakened to religious impressions, so there is something sweetly winning in gazing on the same features, and listening to the same tones, which first won you to Jesus. And I can well imagine that both preacher and hearer now look on each other's time-worn countenances and whitened locks as a closer and more endearing tie, as it approaches that period when it shall be for ever

united in heaven, and they shall both form jewels in their Redeemer's crown.

"Is Holt's occupation," I asked, "confined to his present employment? for if so, it must be both precarious and scanty."

"Oh no! he was and is one of the handiest men in the parish, and is the best thatcher in the country, which is his chief trade. He has laid many and many a generation of thatch on every barn and out-house and cottage for miles around. He can, however, turn his hand to anything; and so you have seen him to-day at his lowlier task of mole-catching."

We had by this time arrived at the mill I have before alluded to, where Mr. Eveling had some business, and cordially wishing me good bye, with an expression of his hope to see me soon again at the Lodge, he turned into the gate leading to the mill, and left me to pursue my further way alone.

CHAPTER IV.

It may be easily imagined that the vicinity of such a character as that of Mr. Eveling formed a frequent attraction in the direction of Eveling Lodge, and that I soon cordially coïncided in the respect and regard which were universally felt towards the various members of that household. I found Mr. Eveling, as may

be guessed from the preceding conversation, a man of strong mind, sterling sense, and considerable information. He was not, in the strict sense of the word, an educated man, but he had that education which takes the deepest root, self-education; and there was at times a shrewdness in his remarks, a clear-sightedness in his views, as well as a superiority in his language, which marked him as far above his class. Neither was he, perhaps, a lover of literature, though fond of reading; but his reading was confined principally to old writers, and such as old Bunyan, Flavel, Howe, and Baxter, with Gurnall and Leighton, were among his favourite studies; and from them he had imbibed not only his clear and decided views on religious subjects, but his somewhat quaint and racy method of expression. Indeed I suspect it was from the "Husbandry Spiritualized" of old Flavel, that he derived many of his hints for conversation with his men on the farm; and, aided by his own natural shrewdness, and still more by that deep fervour of piety which saw GOD in everything, and loved to trace His ways and works in all around Him, his conversation was at all times an abundant storehouse of quick perception and pious observation. He was naturally of a cheerful humour, but the heavy trials through which he had passed no doubt even now pressed sorely upon him, and cast a cloud of sadness over his aged and venerable features.

In old Will Holt, too, I had taken a very lively

interest. It is true, he was literally an illiterate man, for he knew not his letters, and therefore "knowledge at one entrance was, of course, quite shut out." But then he had a couple of ears of which he made such ample use, and, in addition, so tenacious a memory, that I suspect few men were more thoroughly conversant with the Scriptures than he, or could quote them with more appropriate accuracy. Many a time have I stood and talked by his side on a summer evening, after his day's toil was over, and he was busy in his own bit of garden-ground; and have felt that, though I was professedly the teacher, I gained in return many a valuable lesson from the spiritual experiences and even religious knowledge of this simple-minded, single-hearted child of GOD. I frequently differed from him in his views, and sought to convince him he was in error; but his usual answer was, without the slightest mixture of disrespect or self-conceit, "Well, sir, you'll come to it in time; it is GOD'S truth, and I know you won't put that away from you, when you once know it to be so." I would smile incredulously, and he would smile confidently, and so we used to part; but if I had needed an illustration, old Will Holt assuredly furnished one, of what our blessed Lord declared, that GOD frequently "hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes," of His own free-will and sovereign grace: "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

The condition of our labouring poor was naturally a subject of the deepest interest to the minister of an agricultural parish; a parish almost altogether composed of those who had land to till, and those who tilled that land, with just that sprinkling of small tradespeople as are usually gathered together by the wants of the community; a baker, a small grocer, who sold everything—"mouse-traps, and other sweet-meats," as the advertisement once had it; a butcher, who eked out a living by attending the neighbouring markets; one or two shoemakers; an itinerating tailor; two blacksmiths, one for the Dissenters, and the other for the Church-people (for your high-Dissenter is as exclusive as your high-Churchman); a miller, who ground all the corn, and was eminent, as all millers are wont to be, for his pigs and poultry; and last, but not least, a dissenting minister,—a very worthy and excellent man, but whose name unfortunately was a most catching trap for epigrams and puns: such was the general character of our population, and, of course, the labouring class formed by far the larger portion of our community. I therefore seldom omitted any opportunities of enticing Mr. Eveling into such conversations, on the state of the labourer, as might confirm or correct my own views; and, to say truth, the old man had some favourite hobbies, which he was always ready to mount and ride with me. I feel, indeed, that the detail of

any portion, however small, of these conversations may be looked upon as little relevant to the purpose of this narrative; and though so much is now altered, and in some instances amended, yet I feel a deep and not unnatural interest in retracing scenes which once so occupied the thoughts and energies of manhood. I am now transcribing from the memoranda of a note-book, made nearly thirty years ago. Mr. Eveling and Will Holt, and many of those with whom I then used to hold communion, are long since gone to their rest, and grey hairs are now upon my own head, as they were then on theirs; but my feelings on this subject are still unchanged, my convictions more confirmed, and, it may be, my judgment less imperfect. It must be remembered also, that, at the period to which I am now alluding, the abuses of the old Poor Law system had arisen to an alarming and intolerable height; that the whole frame-work of society seemed out of joint, and that, especially among our agricultural peasantry, a spirit of insubordination and defiance and morose repulsiveness had taken place of the once orderly and steady and, I might add, affectionate demeanour which had hitherto marked their conduct. It was, in fact, the period not long preceding what were then called the "Spring Riots," which so disturbed and disorganized the midland counties especially; and during which I myself kept "watch and ward" with my people, as a special

constable, and many a night patrolled our village boundaries with most military vigilance.*

I had accompanied Mr. Eveling one day in the harvest season to inspect his sheep; we had a double purpose in view, the ostensible one to view the flock, the more important one to have some conversation with his shepherd. It has been mentioned in a preceding chapter that Mr. Eveling had always been most particular in his choice of labourers, and that his shepherd especially emulated the Patriarch of Salisbury Plain in the regularity of his attendance on the house of GOD. His subsequent misfortunes had in a great measure scattered these, and death had removed some, and among them his shepherd, while his

* Our military perambulations led to some ludicrous incidents in the over-zeal of some of our corps. One morning we had left one or two men at the different approaches to our village by way of outposts and sentinels, with orders to take up and bring before us every suspicious-looking stranger, who could not satisfactorily account for his presence. It so happened that an old pupil, Lord D——, was coming to spend a few days at the Rectory, and as the coach had deposited him at the head of a lane leading to the village, he was walking most quietly and unsuspectingly onwards. Poor fellow! he was sadly troubled with asthma, and just as he reached the village was taken with a difficulty of breathing, and was leaning over a gate to recover himself. To spy and to pounce upon him were instantaneous; his very attitude and appearance betokened a man who had escaped from a long chase and was panting for breath. Indignation at being roughly questioned by his rustic captors added to his breathlessness and inability to explain, and the scene ended by his lordship's being brought up in custody between two labourers to the house, when of course the whole was explained, and, I need hardly add, most thoroughly enjoyed and laughed over.

diminished means, and the more precarious employment he could afford, had substituted workmen of inferior character, though, as in the case of Will Holt and one or two others, he still retained the occasional services of such as survived. He was however indefatigable in his exertions to produce a better order of things, and when they remained any length of time with him he generally succeeded. His present shepherd however had evaded all his efforts; and though far from an unsteady man, or disreputable in his general conduct, he was yet one over whom in many things a Christian master or minister would mourn. I had frequently been in his house, and had often sought him in the fields, but, though his manner was never positively rude, he plainly evinced a reluctance to come within one's reach, and avoided it whenever he could. On the present occasion, however, such a step was impossible, and he therefore quietly awaited our approach, probably thinking within himself, that he should have a hard job to parry both master and parson.

Our first remarks were altogether of a neutral character; and by praising his flock, and asking a few practical questions, on which he very readily gave me information, he was in some degree led to think that our visit was altogether of a very harmless character, and he even displayed an eagerness to enlighten me, where he thought me ignorant. He was thus himself placed in the position of a teacher, and every man

naturally feels exalted in his own estimation, and consequently on good terms with himself and all around him, when he thinks he is instructing one who, he feels, in other respects is his superior. Having thus imperceptibly paved the way, and put him in good humour with himself and us, it was a natural transition from his sheep to his dog, and I said,

"I suppose, Carr, your dog has all the good qualities of his race, and is in fact half-shepherd himself, and quite shepherd when you are out of the way."

"You may say that, sir," was the reply, "he 's a'most as 'cute as a Christian."

"Does it ever happen," I asked, "that when you send him after a straggling sheep, he fails to bring it back again?"

"I should like to see one of master's sheep, or any in the country, that could nonplush him anyhow. No, no, Bran 's not the dog to be beaten that way, I guess."

"But I suppose some sheep are more difficult to manage than others. I dare say you have observed as many different dispositions among them as countenances; and as it is said a shepherd knows each sheep by its face, so I suppose he knows their different tempers and ways pretty nearly as well."

"That 's quite true, sir; and Bran here, I think, knows them quite as well as I do. If one of them gets a little obstropolous like, he sticks to him like a brick, and turns him till he gets him back again."

"I am glad to hear so good a report of your dog, but still, suppose," I said, "he could n't manage one of those obstropolous sheep, as you call them, and that, do what he could, the sheep would go further and further astray."

Old Carr smiled as he said, "I should like to see that, anyhow."

Bran was lying near his master, with his nose between his fore-feet, apparently taking advantage of the pause to steal a nap, but no doubt listening to every word that was said, and thinking his master a very sensible man, while he felt nothing but contempt for me. "Hye, Bran," said his master, "fetch him," and he pointed to a sheep that was browsing in a distant corner of the field some little way apart from the rest of the flock. In an instant Bran darted off, and in less than a minute the sheep was by our side, while the dog looked in his master's face with a sort of leer, as much as to say, "No mistake there, master," while I said to him,

"I am quite satisfied with the sagacity of Bran; but still you have not answered my question, how you should act if he failed."

"Why, sir, I do n't think it would be the dog's fault, anyhow; and if so be as how such a sheep did get amongst them, I think I should persuade master to cut its throat."

"Well," I replied, "I am glad to hear your decision, particularly as the dog happens to be a repre-

sentation of me, and the sheep of yourself. *My* Master is the good Shepherd, who leads His people like a flock of sheep. He has intrusted to me the trust which you commit to your faithful dog, to reclaim the straggling and to bring back the wandering into His fold. There is, it is true, more docility, more obedience, and it may be more willingness among these dumb and irrational animals than among the wayward, perverted, and obstinate children of men. You yourself even doubt the possibility of one of these sheep foiling the sagacity or zeal of your dog; but, alas! how often have you resisted every effort, and baffled every attempt! On whom must the blame rest, on which will the punishment rest? 'Out of thine own mouth,' may the Lord say, 'will I judge thee.' 'The soul that sinneth *it* shall die.'"

The rebuke had fallen so unexpectedly, and the condemnation had in fact been so elicited from his own mouth, that it could hardly be gainsaid; and I must do the man the justice to say that he attempted no justification, but at once acknowledged its truth by saying, "I can't deny it, sir, it 's not your fault any more than it would be the dog's, and I suppose I deserve what I would have put upon the poor sheep."

"I fear so," was my reply. "There was one before you, who said of himself, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep.' He did not, however, stop at the confession alone; he went on to pray, 'Seek thy servant,'

and he added as a plea, 'I do not forget Thy commandments;' and the result was that he returned to the Shepherd of his soul, and was once more safe in his Master's fold."

"I suppose, Mr. Eveling," I said, after we had quitted the shepherd, "that this man illustrates pretty clearly what I once asked your opinion upon, namely, the change for the worse in our labouring classes. He must be a very different character from your former shepherd, of whom I have so often heard you speak."

"Very different indeed; but I should not say that he illustrates the case you mention, for he is one of a class which, I suppose, the world always has, and ever will see—one who lives altogether for time, and never for a moment admits eternity into his thoughts, who is content to shuffle through life as he best can, and only thinks of death as much the same to man as it is to the beasts that perish around him. In his business this man is clever and experienced, and thoroughly master of his work; and so far faithful, honest, and decent in conduct, that the world has little to say against him, save that false and short-sighted assertion which it so continually makes, that he is nobody's enemy but his own; and were he to quit my service to-day, he would be sure of another to-morrow. It is among the younger and middle-aged men that we see the change most; and what the next generation will be needs no prophet to fore-

tell, unless a very great and essential reform in our system take place."

"The present working of the Poor Law system,"* I said, "seems to me to have sapped the very foundation of society; and has almost compulsorily changed the condition of the labouring class into that of mendicants and paupers. We have forced them to become paupers, and we then treat them as such, and, for aught I see, intend to keep them as such."

"Nothing can be worse," Mr. Eveling answered, "than the present degrading system; but I look on its evils as springing from a still deeper source, and till that is rectified, we may alter, we may modify

* The old Poor Law, of which I am speaking, had sanctioned and abetted that ruinous system called "The Round," under which labourers who were either aged or infirm, or looked upon as sluggish and indifferent workmen, were sent round from rate-payer to rate-payer for so many days' labour, according to the amount of rate, at almost nominal wages, and the poor's rate made up the difference. And the result was that in many places all labour was thus paid by the employer at an utterly inadequate price, and the difference made up out of the poor-rate. For instance, Farmer A. would pay Bill Jones 9*d.* a day, and the poor's rate would make it up to 1*s.* 3*d.* or 1*s.* 6*d.*, or even 2*s.*, according to the number of his family. And in some places I had actually known the labouring men put up to auction on a Monday morning, aye, and on a Sabbath evening, and as they were knocked down to the highest bidder for the week's employ, following him to their drudgery in scowling sullenness or stolid apathy; and the short-sighted farmer thought he had made an excellent bargain in getting labour at a cheap rate, and swelling his poor-rates to an exorbitant and ruinous extent, in having his work done niggardly and slovenly, and making every labourer around him discontented and hostile.

the Poor Law as we will, misery and degradation and exclusion will still follow in their natural succession."

"And what is the evil to which you allude?" I asked.

"I think we employers, the gentry, the landlords, and, in fact, every class above them, have been combined, unintentionally and unconsciously, perhaps, in thrusting them down into a position which neither GOD nor humanity intended for them."

"How?" I asked.

"Why society seems to me as if growing on an artificial hot-bed; every one is trying to grow faster than his neighbour, and, as in a general scramble, the weakest are thrown down, trampled on, and crushed; or, as the Chinese saying runs, 'the great fish eat the small, the small eat the shrimps, and the shrimps eat—the mud.' The injustice of individuals may be submitted to; the wrong of society must rebound on the agents."

"I had at one time," I said, "very sanguine hope that the more extended education of the present day, reaching, at so cheap a rate, even to the poorest, would ere this have effected a greater change in the moral and religious habits of our community; but here I am compelled to say that you employers have materially thwarted, if not altogether neutralized, in rural parishes at least, the efforts that have been making, by taking away the children from our schools

at so early an age, for any miserable task-work for which you may think them fit."

"Aye," he replied, "it is no doubt an evil, though I do not believe to the extent you apprehend; and, though some blame must be laid to the charge of the parents in the matter, one can hardly wonder that the temptation of an added shilling or so to the miserable pittance of their own weekly wages is more than they can withstand."

"It is here, I think, Mr. Eveling," I said, "that your remark of the wrong rebounding on the agents will materially apply. I do not wonder that we are a community of Sabbath-breakers; I do not wonder that our labourers are a demoralized and ignorant class, the ready prey of discontented demagogues, who trade upon grievances, of which Heaven knows there are plenty to set up shop with, or that the public-house is a more attractive place than the church or chapel. Why, look at your own shepherd whom we have just left: he was once a boy, and I have no doubt that his life of labour began at a very early age, and that as a mere child, the moment he was able, or thought able, to scare a bird or mind a pig in the stubbles, he was taken away from all means of instruction in the village or the Sunday School, and left to grow up in ignorance of every truth, and disregard of every religious duty. And are we then entitled, Mr. Eveling, to turn round and taunt and

rebuke that child, when he is grown to manhood, because he is a Sabbath-breaker? Why, he has been trained to Sabbath-breaking; he has been tutored to think every day alike; he has been virtually taught, through all the impressible years of childhood and youth, that a few grains of wheat in a field, or the looking after a herd of swine, is of more value in the eyes of an earthly master than his own soul or his duty to GOD. Can we wonder, I ask, that such an one looks upon the Sunday only with indifference and unconcern, or that when it comes into his own hands to spend as he pleases, he spends it only in idle amusement or in noisy riot?"

"There is no gainsaying your conclusion," was Mr. Eveling's reply; "our own acts have in no small measure tended to keep up around us a generation of Sabbath-breakers and neglecters."

"Of course I do not include you, my good sir, in the censure, for I know how earnest you were with your own labourers."

"I used to think I was earnest at the time, and perhaps I felt so; but I now see much omission where I thought there had not been even a crevice or a chink; and I think there must have been, nay, I am sure there was," and the old man sighed as he said, "something perhaps of vain-glory and conceit, or the edifice would not have fallen into such decay and ruin. The very children of my own early labour-

ers are Sabbath-breakers now; and you know how even poor old Will Holt's family have grown up into all that is disreputable and ungodly."

"I think we may account for that in some degree from his having withdrawn from them through so many years, and especially their years of childhood and youth, his own guidance and superintendence on Sabbath-days. Old Will Holt, I am afraid, has been careful for his own soul, while he has suffered the weeds and docks and thistles to run to seed year after year in the tempers, habits, and dispositions of his children; and the consequence has been, as I told him the other day, that, in the language of Job's curse, "thistles have grown up instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley."

"Of course," said Mr. Eveling, "it is a natural inference that if in such a house as Holt's, and with the example of such a man of GOD, as he undoubtedly is, before their eyes, his children have grown up into self-willed, head-strong, dissolute characters, what must the result be in such hot-beds of ungodliness and immorality as so many households now-a-days present."

"Aye," I said, "just look at yon party on the other side the hedge;" and I pointed to six or seven men who had been engaged in reaping, but were now taking their noon-day's rest and meal under the shelter and in the cool of an adjoining hedge.

"There is one among that party," I continued, "as you know, who has never set one foot on the road heaven-wards, who has never once entered the house of GOD since I have been in the parish, and as far as I can learn never since he was a boy, for any purpose of worship; and yet gray hairs are now upon him, and he has passed his three-score years, and thinks himself so strong, that he has no doubt he shall reach his four-score years, if indeed he ever expects death at all. I should just like, if you have no objection, to go across the field, and, as sportsmen would say, or rather would *not* say, have a shot at them sitting. They seem merry-hearted and good-tempered enough, and indeed it is glorious harvest weather, enough to make any heart rejoice."

I was of course perfectly well known to every one of them; some of them I had visited on their sick beds, and all of them more or less had received kindness at my hands; I was therefore perfectly confident of a favourable reception as long as I confined myself to general remarks and friendly inquiries after their families. Mr. Eveling also had more or less employed them all, as well as known them from their boyhood, so he had no objection to accompany me.

I was indeed anxious for some practical result, and was quite aware that when their time of rest had expired, they would grudge me every moment, and listen with impatience to every word; so immediately

singling out the man I have already alluded to, I said to him,

"Well, Ratcliffe, this is a glorious piece of wheat, is it not?"

"Yes, master, that it be; I never seed, and never reaped, a better."

"I suppose," I said, "it has been some time growing and ripening."

He stared, as if he thought I was quizzing him; but seeing no outward sign of such a purpose, he began, I suspect, like Bran, to pity the parson's ignorance, and to humour it accordingly; for he answered,

"In coorse, sir, I sowed it last autumn, I hoed it this spring, and now I be reaping it this summer."

"Well," I said, "I was pretty well aware of that; but I have heard of a farmer, who was either so ignorant or so lazy that he would not begin to sow till his neighbours were beginning to reap. What do you think of that?"

They all laughed, and with open mouth exclaimed,

"Why he must have been a rummish sort of a farmer, sir, anyhow."

"He certainly was, and when his friends and neighbours remonstrated with him on his folly, and the certain ruin that must ensue, his only answer was, that he should do as well as the rest, and that there was no hurry."

"Well, I never heard the like of that," said Will

Saunders, "I could n't have thought there had been such a man. Did you know him, sir?"

"Oh yes," I said, "perfectly well; and what is more, you know him too, Saunders."

"Do I, sir?"

"Yes," I said; and laying my hand on Ratcliffe's shoulder, I added,

"Thou art the man! The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Have you begun to sow? 'It will be a sad thing to be found just beginning to sow, when you should be tying up your sheaves.'"*

As I said the last words, I turned to my companion, and said,

"Now, Mr. Eveling, we will proceed if you please. Good-day, my friends;" and we quitted the party somewhat hastily, that the impression might not be weakened by any after remark or conversation. We could only hope and pray that the word spoken might be a word in season.

Mr. Eveling shortly after left me for his own dinner hour, and I proceeded onwards to another part of the parish, where I had a message of my Master's to deliver. One indeed soon fell in my way, and though it has in itself no connexion with this separate story of EVELING LODGE, yet as one of the incidents of "My Parish," I can hardly look upon it as out of place. And indeed it is one of the especial privileges,

* Gurnall's Christian Armour.

and I may add responsibilities also, of a minister's parochial walks, that such opportunities are continually presenting themselves; and as the conversations that arise out of these casual encounters seem to spring from no "dead set" at the individual, but rather, if one may so speak, out of a courteous and friendly greeting and interest, they excite no angry feeling, and the arrow of a timely rebuke, though shot apparently "at a venture," finds ingress, as it were, between the joints of the harness, at some unguarded crevice, and may pierce even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.

Shortly after parting with Mr. Eveling I stumbled upon Dick Foyce, one of those characters of whom every village has one or more, a sort of shuffling, slatternly, scampish vagabond, who once indeed had been respectable, or at least more respectable than he had been for a long time, but who had gradually sneaked through all the lanes and by-ways of idleness, drunkenness, mismanagement, and extravagance, till he had finally landed himself in the slough of misery, filth, and rags. His dress was indeed, when I thus met with him, I might literally say, sadly out at elbows. I do not think that he had anything else on but a coat and a pair of trousers, the former buttoned up as far as its two or three buttons would permit, to hide the nakedness beneath, and the latter sadly exhibiting a very dingy skin through its varied rents. And the circumstance that in their better days they

had evidently been the garments of a gentleman, presented a singular inconsistency with the wretchedness of their present aspect, as one often sees a bit of black lace and a feather in a gipsy's bonnet. Had he thrown his hat by the way-side, I really think a beggar would have passed it by in contempt; and yet such as it was he wore it on one side with a sort of jaunty air; while his hair, which had apparently not known, for a long time, either comb or scissors, hung about his face and over his neck. I may add too, he was unshaven, and, for the credit of soap and water I should hope too, unwashed. Such was the character and the outward garb of the man upon whom I so accidentally stumbled. I came upon him indeed rather suddenly, as he was digging a large hole, so that he had no escape, even if he had had time to have meditated flight. My first observation to him was,

"Why, Dick, to judge from your present appearance, your master gives you very bad wages."

"Aye, sir, that you may swear he does," was Dick's reply, with a sort of melancholy grin.

"I thought as much," I said, "in fact I was pretty sure of it beforehand. I have seen several who have worked for him before, and he has generally cheated them into rags. He promised them very fair at first, but the fact is, Dick, he never sticks to his word."

"Why I do n't think so bad of him as that, sir; he gives plaguy little money to be sure, and is uncom-

monly sharp, but I do n't think as how he cheats; he has always at least paid me what we 'greed on."

"And were you," I asked, "such a short-sighted fool as to go into his service for the miserable pay he gives? Why, Dick, I am told you once had a good coat to your back, aye, and a shirt under it, and you had food for your belly, and enough and to spare for your children. You used to be clean and tidy on the Sabbath-day, in the house of GOD; you worked then for a good master, who gave you liberally."

"That 's true, sir, most on it, anyhow; but there wa' n't that difference in wages."

"Not that difference in wages?" I asked; "can you deny that you thrived under the one master, and have come to beggary and rags under the other?"

"I do n't know, sir, but master only pays two shillings a week less than t' other, and though it be uncommon little to be sure, it ain't such a great difference."

"Perhaps not," I said, "but I suspect, Dick, you and I are meaning two different masters. When I alluded to the good master under whom you once served, I meant GOD Almighty, and by the bad one in whose service you now are, I meant the Devil. It is he that has brought you to rags, it is he that is now sneering and laughing at you as one of his cheap purchases and bargains, and with whose wages, bad as they are, you are apparently content, for you

make not an effort, and seem not to have a wish to change."

Poor Dick was confounded at the onslaught, but he said very humbly, and with a good deal of apparent feeling,

"Yes, sir, I do, I'm very sure. I'd be very glad to change; but what am I to do?"

"Do?" I said, "why, 'let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' Do?" I continued, "why do as the poor prodigal did. Go with your rags, your misery, and your guilt, to your Father, and say, 'Father! I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;' and He will put shoes on thy feet, and a coat on your back, and will welcome you as one who was lost, but is found, who was dead, but is alive again."

CHAPTER V.

Some few years had now elapsed since the period of my first visit to Eveling Lodge; and every time I saw the old man added to the affectionate and almost reverential regard which I felt for him. Though half a century of years intervened between our respective ages,

the relative positions in which we were placed in some degree neutralized the space; and if the superiority of age on the one side claimed deference from myself, my own station as his minister claimed and met equal deference in return. There is too, no doubt, a secret link, an unseen tie, which, though it cannot be defined, binds in peculiar fellowship those who are united in Christ Jesus; and many of GOD'S children have found, to their especial comfort, that "this secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and have felt in their own experience the sweetness of that promise recorded in the prophet, when "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon His name." And so it was in the present instance. Mr. Eveling seldom came into the village without calling at the Rectory; and my own steps, in any more lengthened walk, generally turned, in going or returning, in the direction of his Lodge. I found him, from long experience and acquaintance with all the families and genealogies of the place, a very useful "Parish Guide;" and though he seldom, if ever, took any share in parochial business, he was ever ready to lend the benefit of his counsels to myself. His advanced age, the evening hour at which our parish meetings were held, and his distance from the School-house where we met, were sufficient pleas for his absence on these occasions; and it might

be that he felt a natural reluctance to mingle, though on an equality, in discussions where he had avowedly and by consent of all once taken the lead as chief proprietor and almost Squire of the parish. The generations too of farmers, like boys at school, or youths at college, are seldom long-lived, and most of those who had known him in his more affluent days had migrated to other tenures, or to "that bourne from whence no traveller returns," and a younger and a different race of men had sprung up around him, with whom he could hold but little fellowship.

His son, however, was not an unfrequent attendant at our meetings; and from his personal character, as well as his useful practical habits of business and sound sense, exercised much valuable influence over our little community. I have hitherto said very little of Mr. Eveling, junior; partly because the present record relates chiefly to his father, and because his own active habits of out-door life, and his attendance at markets, brought me far less frequently into that more intimate intercourse with him which I enjoyed with the father. We did, however, occasionally meet, and it was impossible not to be struck with the devotedness of filial affection, which seemed almost the master-feeling of his heart. There was a child-like simplicity in the fondness with which he seemed to watch the old man's movements, and anticipate every wish; and it was touching, most touching, to witness the responsive feeling with which it was met on the part of his father;

and I used often, in raillery, to say that he and his son were spoiling each other by their mutual petting, and that one spoiled child in a family was quite enough. The old man would smile and say, that as far as that matter went, he did not know which was the greater child of the two, himself or his son, "though, I suppose," he added, "the world will say, there is no child like the old child; and, indeed, you know 'twice a child' is the prerogative of lengthened age."

It was on Christmas-day, 18—, that I found Mr. Eveling, his son, and the two elder children, awaiting my arrival at the church. It was one of the excellent rules of that well-regulated household, from which accident alone ever caused them to deviate, to be present at the whole of the service; and to come, too, in sufficient time to compose both mind and body with decent solemnity to the holy ordinances in which they were about to engage. Mr. Eveling was a consistent and conscientious member of the Church of England, and admired, nay loved with peculiar fervour, its truly Scriptural liturgy, which he frequently pronounced to be the master-piece of uninspired human writing; and it would have been, I am sure, a positive privation to him, had he on any Sabbath missed any portion of its service.

To his workmen or more indifferent persons he would call the late attendance of many irreverent, and unbecoming sinful men, and would use the arguments or remonstrances he thought most adapted to those

with whom he was conversing; but when he spoke of himself or those dear to him, he would describe it as "robbing him of his portion of meat in due season." And so indeed would any Christian spirit find it: from its opening sentence to its concluding blessing there is a link which seems to unite the whole as one connected service, and though one knows or has been told that its portions are distinct and separate, and intended for different services, yet the associations of a whole life, both memory, too, and habit, so stamp their approving seal on our present practice, that where, I must not say a mutilated but a divided liturgy is presented to our devotion, one seems to feel, as my old friend expressed it, that we are robbed of a portion of our meat in our appointed service.

It would be quite irrelevant in this place to enter on the changes suggested, proposed, and urged at the present day, and the war-cry of separation which has been wrung from the pages of our Prayer-book, the Shibboleth of party, which a tortured word has presented to the brothers and sisters of the same family. But I would still say, as not altogether out of place, and as at least the feelings of one who has been, though in his lowly obscurity and seclusion, no unobservant watcher of events, that those were happy days, days at least of peace, when parents and sponsors and ministers could alike meet at the same font and present their little ones to Jesus, in the full assurance that He would "for His part most surely

keep and perform" every portion of His covenanted promise; that when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not," He meant it in all the fulness and freeness of His overflowing love. And when we alike knelt before Him to ask for grace and strength for ourselves and our little ones, to keep our respective portions of the covenant, we felt that we were asking in one spirit and with the same mind. Then, indeed, the waters of baptism were not, as now, waters of bitterness; men met not, like the herdmen of Gerar and the herdmen of Isaac, over the well they had dug, only to make it and call it a well of strife and contention.

To return, however, to our narrative. At the close of the service, when the many, alas! had retired, and the few remained to share in the holy emblems of a dying Saviour's love, Mr. Eveling and his son were found, according to their wont, among the number of the communicants; and as they knelt side by side, father and son together, before the rails of the communion table, I was peculiarly impressed with the affecting sight. The aged man, though still hale and vigorous, had run his allotted span, and labour and sorrow only were the attendant companions of his fourscore years. His furrowed cheeks told of many a channel where silent tears had traced their course; and as his eyes were raised to heaven, and his heart seemed to swell with its secret communings, I thought that, perhaps, ere another year had closed its round,

the place that had known him so long might know him no more, and that he might be called away to that home of heavenly rest, where sorrow and sighing should be no more, and where tears should be wiped away from all faces for ever. The fine manly figure of the son, and his ruddy hue of health and vigour, told of a long life of usefulness and activity, when he should occupy his father's place; and in his appointed time, like the patriarchs of old, he too should be "gathered to his people."

At the conclusion of the service the father and his son walked with me to my own door, on their way home; and there was much affectionate and holy warmth in the manner and tone in which the old man implored the blessings of the season on my future path; and I trust they were as fervently reëchoed on his own, nor could I help adding—

"*Your* redemption, Mr. Eveling, draweth nigh; a little way further, and a little time longer, and 'sorrow and sighing shall be done away, and GOD Himself wipe away all tears from every eye.' Your son and I have, humanly speaking, many a winter's season before us, ere we reach the 'maturity fit for our Father's garner.'"

"And many a summer's sun too, I hope," was the reply. I cordially shook hands with him at the little wicket-gate of the Rectory, into which I was about to enter, and as Mr. Eveling, junior, said he had a message which he wished to deliver himself, he accom-

panied me into the house, while his father proceeded homewards alone. I inquired after his wife, whose detention from the services of the day, I knew, had been occasioned by her confinement, and the inquiry at once led to the object of his visit; a wish that on New Year's Day the christening of his infant son might take place; "for," he added, "neither father nor I like to have such duties delayed."

The arrangement was soon made, and I observed to him,

"Your family, Mr. Eveling, are fast growing up around you—your quiver is being stored with many a goodly arrow; and though happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them, yet I fear these are not the times when agricultural pursuits are very successful."

"There is difficulty, sir," he replied, "in every employment at present. It is as much as we can expect to keep our heads above water; but I have no right, and no wish, to complain, for when I look back upon the past, mercies are far more abundant than trials; and father, you know, says that as trials, so mercies abound. So, according to both our creeds, it is well with us."

"It must assuredly," I replied, "be one of the many, and perhaps the chiefest you have to acknowledge, that you have been permitted to add to the comforts of your father's old age, and that after so

many buffetings he has apparently found peace and quietness at the last."

"I do indeed," he said, "look upon it as GOD's crowning mercy that He has given to me such a father, whose practice and precept have ever gone hand in hand in leading me to what is right and holy, and that He has given me also a heart to value such a blessing. I hope my own children may find in me what I have ever found in him."

"It is not, Mr. Eveling, example alone that can lead the stubborn and depraved heart of man; your father and yourself have known that by sorrowful experience. Nor is it even committing your children in fervent prayer to GOD; for no doubt your father has uttered many a strong and fervent cry to GOD in behalf of your erring brother."

"He has indeed, sir. I do not remember, in our family worship, his ever omitting some allusion more or less pointed, which we at least could well understand, to the erring absent one; and what his strivings in his own chamber have been are known only to GOD and himself. But, sir, what are we to do without prayer, if prayer is unavailing?"

"Certainly not to leave prayer unuttered; to pray on, to continue instant and more instant in prayer; for I believe that the recollection of those fervent prayers for his child is the most precious solace to your father's heart, and it may be, that even now GOD

will not suffer the child of so many prayers to perish. But when I said, 'it was not even prayer,' I meant that it was the work of GOD's own sovereign grace; that the conversion of a soul to GOD was the work of His own Holy Spirit, and that, in using the appointed means, and fervently and humbly seeking a blessing on those means, we are still dependent on His will to grant or to withhold the grace, as He sees best in His own inscrutable wisdom. You are about to bring your own infant, in a few days, to be 'ingrafted into the body of Christ's church,' and I would say to you, 'Pray, and pray earnestly for it, that it may grow up and flourish, till it becomes a 'tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord;' and yet you know, that unless that graft 'abide in the vine, it cannot bear fruit.' We cannot look around us without seeing and acknowledging that there are many trees which are not of the Lord's planting, however fair they look to the casual glance, and that they are still withering and stunted in the waste and howling wilderness; and yet they were all carefully and, I doubt not, in many an instance prayerfully transplanted, set in the garden, watered with a mother's tears, and nurtured beneath a father's eye, but they have not taken root. The seed may have vegetated for a brief season, but it has found no depth of soil; the sap may have caused the graft to bud, and put forth a leaf here and there, but having 'no root in Christ'—not having become incorporated with, or united to, the parent tree, it has

soon withered away, and brought no fruit to perfection. I do not, however, for a moment doubt, Mr. Eveling, that many a child has been called effectually and set apart by GOD'S sovereign grace, even from its mother's womb, and that even before the waters of baptism have been poured on its head, it has been a regenerated child; nor do I doubt that in the Lord's own appointed ordinance of baptism He graciously vouchsafes a listening ear to the prayer which shall then be offered up from a pure heart fervently, and that many a child receives remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration, and henceforth has power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh. May it be so with your own new-born babe! and that, as he grows in stature, he may grow in grace also, and in favour with GOD and man! And as this, Mr. Eveling, is the season when kindly wishes are on every lip and in every heart, I do sincerely desire that the blessing of the Lord may be on you and yours during the ensuing year; or, to use the words of the Lawgiver of Israel, 'Blessed be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep!'"

"Thank you, thank you, sir, and the same to you and yours," was his fervent response. "I trust another year, with the Lord's blessing, will see my father free from every difficulty; and then, if He spare my life, I must begin to labour for my poor children."

We parted with a request on his part that, after the ceremony of admitting his little infant among the number of Christ's flock, I would go up to the Lodge and join their family circle; and he kindly added, "Father desired me to say he should not think our little feast complete without your blessing."

I had intended to visit the Lodge on the following day to wish them all, under their own roof, the promised blessings of the season, but a violent and continued rain during the whole day prevented my purpose, and as other necessary engagements intervened, I determined to delay the visit till the appointed day of the christening. On the third morning, however, my servant came hastily into my room, and said,

"Mr. Eveling, sir, is very ill, and they have sent down to ask you to come up immediately."

"Mr. Eveling?" I exclaimed in much surprise; "he was in perfect health when I parted from him on Christmas-day: when was he taken ill?" and I added almost instinctively, "Poor old man!"

"It is not the old gentleman, sir, it is Mr. Samuel; they say he can't recover."

I was, as may be well supposed, much shocked, and hastily inquired what particulars she knew. But as I found the messenger from the Lodge was still waiting, I desired the man might come in, and as far as I could gather from his confused and imperfect statement, it appeared that on that day of violent rain Mr. Samuel Eveling had been long engaged at a

neighbouring town, and on returning to his home had neglected to change his clothes; that in the night he had been taken with a violent shivering fit; that his illness increased fearfully during the following day, and had been this morning pronounced a case of malignant and most virulent typhus fever. On receiving this information, I did not lose a moment, but proceeded with the utmost expedition to the Lodge. So lately had I seen him in all the buoyancy of health and manly strength, that I could hardly credit the statement I had heard, and hoped, though with indefinable dread, that rumour had magnified the danger. The conversation I had with him but four days before flashed across my recollection, and, in the emotion of my heart, I exclaimed, "How unsearchable are Thy judgments, O Lord, and Thy ways past finding out!"

I was not long in reaching the Lodge. Everything seemed to be going on as usual, the flail with its dull heavy flap sounded monotonously on my ear, and the lowing of the cattle in the yard seemed strangely dissonant. How chilling are the sounds even of wonted life, when one feels that death is, or may be, busy close at hand! I hurried to the door; and, as I opened it, the old man met me in the narrow passage, and as the light glanced upon his face, I saw that he was bathed in tears. He wrung my hand convulsively, and attempted to speak, but nature could not be controlled, and his loud sobs, with the heaving of his chest, told how *his* life was bound up in the life of

his child. I led him to the little parlour, and, placing him in the seat he usually occupied, said to him,

"When I first saw you, Mr. Eveling, on this very spot, you said 'GOD'S will be done!' He is the same GOD, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Oh then still say, 'His will be done!'"

He shook his head, as if like Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, and his only answer was in the same convulsive sobs.

I saw that at that moment of bursting anguish consolation would be unheeded, and I therefore said,

"May I see him? Will you show me his room?"

He pointed with his hand to the stairs, but still remained fixed and sobbing in his seat.

"You will accompany me?" I said.

"Oh no, no! I could not bear it."

I was not to be repulsed, for I felt that if I could once get him to the bedside joining on his knees in prayer, it would do more to calm the troubled spirit than any remonstrances or consolations I could offer; so I said,

"Surely, Mr. Eveling, you will not refuse? Let us go and pray by his bedside; who can tell whether GOD will be gracious unto us that he may live?"

He instantly arose and led the way. As we quitted the room, a little girl with the infant in her arms met us at the foot of the stairs; it was crying loudly, as if pining for the absence of its mother. I stopped for an instant to gaze upon the babe, uncon-

scious as it was of the scene of sorrow around: and the old man too, looking upon it, as its cries thrilled through his heart, said,

"Ah! poor thing! you are unhappy too; but you know not *our* sorrow. GOD has smitten us sorely."

"It is indeed," I replied, "GOD that smites; you remember the father of old, who said, 'It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

As we entered the room, I could hear the stifled and suppressed sobbings of the wife, who was standing at the bedside, gazing in speechless anguish on her husband's fevered countenance, which now, alas! recognised no one. A nurse was at the other side, supporting his enfeebled head, and at the foot was the medical attendant, on whose countenance I looked intently; but he turned aside as if unwilling to communicate the apprehensions he could not but feel. I had indeed over-calculated my strength, and had thought myself proof against those emotions, which too often interrupt our usefulness on such occasions; but as I looked around and saw the weeping wife and the convulsed father, and then gazed on the unconscious frame sinking rapidly into dissolution, while busy instant thought ran through every scene of the past, my firmness failed me, and, in the language of Scripture, "I lifted up my voice and wept." I came to console; alas! I only added to the grief.

In a few moments, however, a strong effort mastered the emotion, and I said,

"He cannot pray for himself; let us pray for him to Him who alone is mighty to save."

I instantly sank upon my knees by his bedside, and for a moment hid my face in my hands. I know not that I thought on words, but, as if instinctively, I began,

"In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour, but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased. Yet, O Lord GOD most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death!"

The old man, kneeling at my side, at once recognised the sentence, and seemed to feel it as the sealing of his bereavement, for he uttered a groan so deep, that it throbbed at my very heart.

His daughter's face was hid in the clothes of the bed, and I could only tell of her agony by the trembling of her frame. So I proceeded to implore Him, who killeth and maketh alive, who bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up, who woundeth and His hands make whole, to have mercy on the helpless being who then lay prostrate beneath His hand. Yet if the decree was gone forth, and the body was to return to the dust from whence it came, that the spirit might return to Him who gave it, washed and made clean through the blood of Him who died upon the cross to save! The old man uttered an "Amen!" so audibly and so earnestly, that my hopes for him at

least were again awakened, and I went on to pray that He who despised not the prayer of the poor destitute, and who in all our afflictions was Himself afflicted, would, even while His hand was thus smiting heavily and sorely, remember mercy in the midst of judgment, and support the bereaved father, the widowed wife, and the fatherless children, under the deep affliction with which He was visiting them, that they might be enabled to trace His hand in the event, and in the fulness of submission to His gracious will to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

I had watched the countenance of the dying man, to see if I could trace any recognition of what was passing in such sorrowful solemnity by his side; but he seemed unconscious of all; the sobs of the convulsed father were unheard, the stifled wailings of the wife were unheeded, every prayer apparently fell pointless on his ear.

Before however I arose from my knees, I determined to try the effect of that petition which had been familiar to him from infancy, and I commenced the Lord's Prayer. The first words however had scarcely escaped my lips, ere the dying man raised his head, his chest heaved, his lips opened in convulsive motion, and the words, "Our Father," were distinctly uttered.

It was the last effort of the expiring Christian; and, ere many hours had passed, he was, I humbly hope, with his "Father."

CHAPTER VI.

I HAVE neither wish nor intention to invade the sanctity of that sorrow which had now entered the peaceful and comparatively happy home of Mr. Eveling. The event mentioned in the last chapter was a blow which probably he had never contemplated as ever coming within the reach of human likelihood, and the very suddenness and unexpectedness of which might, for a time at least, have almost paralysed feeling. But what the world thinks insensibility is not so in GOD'S sight; and what to the casual observer seems the providential blunting and deadness of the feelings in old age is in reality, to the more experienced inquirer, the exercise of the graces of patience and resignation wrought in the sufferer's heart by the power of the Holy Ghost; and which, even in the thickest and darkest of the storm, speaks of "a name better than of sons and of daughters." He may become dumb and open not his mouth, as Aaron and David did before him; but why? because he feels not the blow? No; but because "it is the Lord's doing." And as far as my own knowledge went, I had daily cause to bless GOD for the truth of His own recorded word, so evidently manifested in this aged sufferer, that "every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more

fruit." It was so, indeed, with Mr. Eveling; he reminded me of one of the old elm-trees in his own hedge-rows, shaken and bent beneath the storm, but which, when the storm had passed by, showed how the earth too had been shaken about its roots, and with what renewed vigour it again rose more firmly rooted than ever.

It was, however, a very melancholy and painful reverse which the death of his son caused in Mr. Eveling's worldly state. At first, and for a few weeks, all seemed to go on as usual, but it was evident to those who were well acquainted with his and his son's circumstances, and probably he himself felt it in his own heart, that the last drop of bitterness had not been as yet poured into his cup. Creditors, who had forborne their claims while the son lived to labour for their interests, now became urgent; and though at the time I thought them hard and exacting, yet, perhaps, justice to their own families required the stern exaction of their rights. The property was surrendered into the hands of trustees to meet, as far as it could, every claim; but it was soon ascertained that it would go but a little way to meet the various demands of creditors, far less leave any surplus for the bereaved family; and it became a painful source of anxiety what was to become of the old father himself, the widow, and her fatherless children.

Through the assistance of some Christian friends, whose bounty was ever ready at the call of distress—

(may He, who knoweth them all by their names, accept their labour of love for Christ's sake!)—a sufficient fund was secured to obviate immediate want; and once more Mr. Eveling quitted his home, and became the occupier of a lowlier cottage, which I had provided for him and his widowed daughter-in-law and her family. It was a great comfort too, that, through the same benevolent liberality, I had been enabled to purchase most of the furniture on which his eye had been accustomed to gaze for so many years; and when, on the evening of his removal, I placed the aged man in the old and easy chair on which he had sat probably from the day of his father's death, and said to him with significant emphasis, "GOD's will be done, Mr. Eveling!" it was most touching to see the more than placid smile which for a moment lightened up his furrowed features, and the almost instant look of deep and reverential piety which succeeded, while, adopting the language of the dying Patriarch, he said with tremulous emotion,

"The GOD, which hath fed me all my life long unto this day—the Angel, which redeemed me from all evil, bless thee!"

It is a melancholy evidence of our fallen nature, that the very circumstances which seem most calculated to elicit every affectionate and gentle and benevolent feeling of the heart in some, never fail also to bring up to the surface much that is selfish and base and mean. The very condition of destitution to which

Mr. Eveling was now reduced, and the kindly interest that had been excited in many on his behalf, led to a very painful act of oppression on the part of one of his creditors.

This man had hitherto pertinaciously refused all offers of accommodation or compromise, and, though Christian charity would fain think no evil, it was too evident that in this resistance he relied on the humane dispositions of others to interpose between him and his victim. One afternoon he was announced as wishing to see me, and, on being admitted, he abruptly commenced his introduction by saying,

"I am a creditor of Mr. Eveling's, sir."

"I hope not a hard one," I replied.

"I only want my right, sir, and it's hard to be kept out of that."

"But far harder," I answered, "for a man of fourscore years to be obliged to surrender all he has in the world, for no misconduct or extravagance of his own, and to be reduced in his old age from comparative wealth to a parish-pittance or the charity of strangers.—But, at any rate," I added, "you can have no business with me; I am not your debtor, nor am I Mr. Eveling's agent."

"I know that, sir," he answered; "but I understood you had taken a great interest in him, and I thought you might like to save the old gentleman from a gaol."

"Indeed I should," I replied; "and think that

no one with the common feelings of humanity would wish to inflict such a disgrace on his venerable age. You are, however, mistaken, if you suppose that I have the means, or the power to use the means, if I had them, in the way you propose. You are aware that he has surrendered all, 'even to a shoe-latchet.'"

"I don't know that, but the law says that he that can't pay in purse must pay in person."

"Well, sir," I replied, "I am not here to argue law with you. I trust, for his sake, nay, for your own sake—for such an act must recoil on yourself—that you will forbear such severity as you threaten; but I have no means to avert it: and as to Mr. Eveling himself, he who has bent his head so long and so unmurmuringly to the chastisements of his GOD, may well bear the puny wrath of a fellow-mortal like himself."

I felt a sort of instinctive dread that he would be as little moved by my remonstrances as convinced by my assertions of inability to aid, and therefore thought it but judicious and kind to mention the circumstance to him who was so immediately concerned. To obviate the threat seemed almost an impossibility, for the appropriation of the little fund I had raised to the payment of the debt would have left the family utterly unprovided for; and yet to see the old man the inmate of a prison was an alternative which I now felt his creditor had acted most wisely, according to the wisdom of this world, in holding up before one's eyes. I therefore determined at once to see Mr.

Eveling, and be guided by his feelings. It was indeed a painful communication to make, but I had seen so much of calm and composed submission under far heavier sorrows, that I trusted he would in this also seek and find that support which had never failed him even in the deepest waters and the hottest fires. The case was therefore plainly laid before him; the means that certainly existed for his extrication, but the alternative which such an application of them would assuredly involve; and, without a moment's hesitation, without expressing, perhaps without feeling, a pang at the decision, he at once said,

"It must not be, it must not be! It matters little where my few remaining days are passed: GOD is the 'GOD of the valleys, as well as of the hills.' He did not forget nor forsake Joseph in the prison of Egypt, and I may say of this poor man that would send me there, as Joseph said of his brethren, 'It is not he, but GOD, that sends me there.' I am quite ready and willing; here or in prison I can still say, 'It is well.'"

The hour, indeed, soon came, and Mr. Eveling's next removal was to gaol! I was with him at the time of his departure; and the old man, with his staff in his hand, set forth with as firm a tread, and as unyielding a trust, as the Patriarch of old set forth from the land of his fathers, "not knowing whither he went," nor "what should befall him by the way." There was even a smile—a melancholy one perhaps—

but still a smile, as he shook me by the hand and said, with marked and expressive meaning, "GOD's will be done."

I shall not attempt to delineate the scene of sorrow under his own roof, nor the indignation that was almost universally felt and expressed throughout the parish, far less would I speak of my own feelings on the occasion. It was well, perhaps, that other duties arose to compel attention and divert the thoughts. The next day I accidentally fell in with old Will Holt in the course of my rambles; and it was a natural remark, after the first salutation,

"Well, Holt, your poor old master has once more changed his home."

"Aye, sir," he said, "and I would a'most as much he 'd changed it for his long home; he 'd have been more at peace there; but GOD knows what is best for us, and that 's a great comfort in every time of trouble. But, sir, may I speak my poor mind to you about Master Eveling? it has been on my thoughts many a long day."

"Certainly, Holt; I believe you feel for the poor old man almost a brother's affection—'a brother beloved in the Lord.' You and he have rubbed on together many a long year, and if one member suffer, all must suffer with it; and I believe, Holt, like the Galatians of old for their beloved minister, 'if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to him,' if you could have saved

him from this last blow. What is it you would suggest?"

"Why, sir, mayhap you have heard that not very far from here is a place called Rothwell Hospital. It's not a hospital like them up in London for the sick and diseased, but it's a place of refuge for the aged and decayed, of such as be of master's class and station—not such as we; we've got the workhouse to go to, and thank GOD even for that! The Baronet up yonder is one of the trusts, and I'm sure, if he were spoken to, Master Eveling might get a berth for the remainder of his days; and I should sleep better than I did last night, to think he were not going to end his days in a prison, like a felon."

I need not say that no time was lost in bringing his truly excellent suggestion to bear. It was met with an almost simultaneous desire on the part of every one to further it; and where all were willing and earnest, difficulties were soon removed; and in the course of a very short time I had the unbounded gratification of announcing to Mr. Eveling the successful exertions of his friends, and the goodness of GOD in providing this retreat of quietude and peace for his remaining days. When I told him of the probability of his retirement to a prison, he had received the intelligence with a smile; but now, when I told him how the Lord had prepared for him, as for aged Israel, a Goshen for the rest of the days of his pilgrimage, he burst into tears, and said,

"I have been young, and now am old, yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread."

Mr. Eveling was now withdrawn from my more immediate observation, and I saw him but seldom. I find at the close of the record which I made at the time, and which it was my habit to make of those circumstances in my ministerial walk which interested me most, and which gave me most insight into the ways and works of Him that sent me among this people,—I find the following concluding sentence respecting Mr. Eveling:—

"There, undisturbed by the cares of this world, and no longer tossed by its storms, and awaiting his summons hence, as the labourer who has finished his day's toil, does Mr. Eveling, in humble reliance on the all-sufficient atonement of his Saviour, pray that he may be counted worthy, through His merits, to receive the meed of commendation and approval, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!'"

That summons has long since come; many years have passed away, since he entered into his rest; and there is a melancholy pleasure, at this distant time, in retracing those passages of pleasant intercourse and Christian fellowship which I enjoyed with this aged sufferer. It might have been that there were moments when a question arose in my heart, "Wherefore, O Lord, contendest thou with him?" but it is

not so now, and I glorify GOD for the testimony He gave in the case of this suffering one of the truth of His own recorded promise, that "whom He loveth He chasteneth."

CHAPTER VII.

I WOULD just add one little episode as a conclusion to the narrative of Mr. Eveling and his family. In itself it is of no consequence; it can scarcely be said "to point a moral," and it may be added, "nor adorn my tale," yet at the time it made so deep an impression, that I find its record among other parochial details, and those readers who have accompanied me thus far may not be unwilling to turn over an additional chapter that details an incident in Mrs. Eveling's widowed life. She herself too is now gathered to those that went before her, a period of twenty-seven years having elapsed since the death of her husband; but the circumstances to which I am now alluding occurred not very long after that event, and while my aged and revered friend was still surviving.

Mrs. Eveling, at the period referred to, was still occupying the cottage at first provided for her, and her own industry with her needle, and ingenuity in little knick-knackeries of female workmanship and skill, sufficed, with the slender aid of the still guarded fund,

to keep herself and family above want, and in the maintenance of that respectability of station to which she had been accustomed, and below which she could not bear that her children should descend. Her desolate condition with four helpless children, and the youngest ushered into the world amid so much of grief and sorrow, and still almost a babe in arms,—the name she bore, and the associations connected with that name,—added to the sympathy and respect with which she was universally treated, and no doubt procured her valuable employment, when others sought it in vain. Occupied too with the incessant cares and requirements of her young family, Mrs. Eveling had but little time, if she had any desire, for intercourse with those who looked upon her present fortunes as having perhaps brought her down to their own level, and who could not understand, and were therefore offended at, the exclusiveness which kept her aloof from her neighbours.

"One would think Madam Eveling might come down from her high hooks," said one.

"She do n't get parish pay, it 's true; but, to my mind, it 's pretty much like pauper's pay," said another.

"Better that than worse," said a third; and it was pretty evident that, even within the narrow limits of a small rustic village, as rank a crop of envy, jealousy, heart-burning, unkindness, and malevolent insinuation was springing up, gradually dropping its seed here and there and everywhere, carried by the birds

and wafted by the winds and all other modes of unseen but sure conveyance, as ever grew amid the rankling class-exclusiveness of a county or cathedral town.

It so happened that about this time circumstances required my leaving home for a period of some weeks, though I had made arrangements for receiving regular intelligence of every incident affecting the well-being of my little flock, that, though absent, I might in some measure be present with them. The facilities of locomotion are indeed in these days immeasurably increased, as well as the means of intercourse between the parted ones, and one may well agree with Toplady, who said even of his remoter days, that "it was a great advantage to be born in the old age of time;" yet still one does not find that railroads, electric telegraphs, nor penny postages can much diminish, far less obliterate, the anxieties and apprehensions of absence. "Sedet post equitem atra cura" is still true, and will be to the end of time.

It may be well imagined, that among the many claimants on my sympathy and interest whom I had left behind, Mrs. Eveling and her children held no inferior post; though, indeed, knowing much and suspecting more of the groundless jealousy and unkind insinuation of some, I was not altogether sorry that the absence of her minister would for a time at least suspend those little marks of personal kindness

and attention, which had, I doubted not, added fuel to the jealousy, and which I now hoped would die out like an untended fire. At first indeed the accounts were generally such as a minister could wish of those over whom his heart was yearning. After a time, however, I observed a hesitation and reluctance in mentioning Mrs. Eveling's name; it was reserved to the last, as if half inclined to evade it; then it was foisted into a postscript, as if unwilling, on second thoughts, to omit it altogether, and it ran in some such niggard strain as this, "I hope too your pensioner, Mrs. Eveling, will prove deserving of your kindness." The coldness of this faint hope was more painful even than a direct charge, because it showed that my correspondent had not himself escaped the infusion of the unkindness; and one knows how easily the mind receives taint upon taint, when once impregnated with the poison. Nor indeed could one be blind to the fact, how even the rumour of a respectable person giving any the slightest credence to a report adds strength and authenticity and circumstance to scandal. It is bad enough and sad enough, when an old crone, known of all to be a gossip-monger, gives utterance to a lie; but when a person of credit and education and superior station just hints at wrong, and hesitates a charge, the mischief becomes almost irretrievable. I do not wonder at the law of GOD affixing such a responsibility even to idle words; the dagger of the assassin is not so envenomed a weapon,

and makes not so wide a rent, as some "envious Casca" with his tongue. I therefore set myself immediately to counteract, as far as I could in absence, the mischief which I could not but perceive was extending; and I accordingly wrote to my correspondent, who was in fact our village schoolmaster, and by anticipation the Scripture-reader of his day, to this effect—

"Your mention of Mrs. Eveling was rather ambiguous and unsatisfactory,—pray be more explicit in your next; but be on your guard against giving any credence to reports which can only, I suspect, be traced to one or two idle, discontented, envious persons. You know with what stealthy pace evil fame creeps on, undermining a little to-day, and a little to-morrow, till the whole fabric tumble in upon the unconscious victim, who is sitting in fancied security beneath its shelter." To this I received in reply an assurance that the writer knew of nothing that warranted even suspicion, but that certainly in some way or other reports had prevailed of an unkind tendency, but which could be traced to no other source than such as I had suspected.

It was, however, with much satisfaction that I at length found my steps turned homewards. There is much even under ordinary circumstances that is peculiarly gratifying and repaying to a Christian pastor, on his return to his flock after a period of absence. Home, indeed, is consecrated to all by its appropriate

ties, and there are under its roof beating hearts and busy hands and running feet, eager with all the little devices of love, and preparations of affectionate contrivances, to welcome the wanderers home. And how one's own heart beats, and one's own eyes are strained, as the various tokens of recognition rise up one after another—yon shattered oak, and that spreading elm, the homestead of a lodge, the village spire peeping above the trees, and the glimpse of one's own rising chimneys, as each in successive turn greets the view, and calls forth, as it is caught, some exclamation of grateful welcome and remembrance.

But as the village pastor wends his way nearer and nearer, he marks his approach, not only, nor so much, by the inanimate land-marks which peep out before him in the view, as by the living memorials which press around him on every side: here a group of playful children, their school-day over, some with twined circlets of rushes on their heads or around their necks, by a grassy bank, like a bevy of little romping gnats, on a summer's eve, mingling in all the evolutions of their mazy dance, and stopping in their artless mirth to recognise the features of their well-beloved pastor, and then scampering off at once to announce the long-expected return. Here an aged matron returning with tottering steps from the village shop with her little purchase, and for a moment wondering who it can be that hails her so loudly by her name, till the well-known tones of the familiar voice

strike upon her ear and heart in all their wonted cordiality and fervour; while from time to time some labourer, returning from his toil with slow and heavy tread, and satchel on his back, gives back the salutation with a lightened look and a joyous smile.

But I must not tarry in recalling scenes like these, they are long since passed away. Railroads have destroyed most of these old associations, and these pleasant greetings by the wayside as one nears home. Whirled up in hurried velocity to your station, almost, as it were, bundled out of your carriage with unceremonious haste, and every thought occupied in collecting your luggage, while the train snorts and groans and whistles in most discordant displeasure, as if grudging every moment of its detention; amid porters and station-master, who see too many passengers to heed the solitary unit that swells their number—all those touching incidents and reminiscences, which memory has so fondly traced, have long since disappeared from the scene. And yet I doubt not that even now in many a remote parish, in many a rural hamlet, many a secluded cure, there might still be found scenes and ties and associations as interesting and as close as those I have described: and though in so many an instance the work has overgrown human strength, it has not yet reached the limits of human endurance, love, and zeal, nor ever will as long as the love of God is shed abroad in man's heart by the Holy Ghost.

It may be easily conjectured that the next day saw me an early visitor at Mrs. Eveling's cottage. The nature of the insinuation against her character may be easily surmised; and I could not but feel peculiar delicacy in stating such a charge to her, feeling confident that not a whisper, not a breath of such a rumour had ever reached her own ears; and that she, in fact, would be the last to learn the evil reports so ungenerously rife in our little community, and which after all I could trace to no other source than ill-natured gossip. No doubt a sense of the difficulty of my own position gave a more serious air to the salutation with which I first greeted her, and, perhaps, in return, chilled the warm welcome with which I should undoubtedly have been met. A few inquiries were made after her own health and welfare, and that of her children; and then of "the old man of whom I have spoken," "Is he yet alive?"

Let me just stop one moment, reminded by this quotation, to remark how touchingly and simply beautiful and true to nature is that inquiry of Joseph after his aged father; how it shows the anxiety and burning impatience and longing that was in his heart, and could not be restrained. The very first question that he asks, and with such intense and almost inexpressible interest, and such reïterated inquiry, "Is your father well? the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?"—one almost wonders that even the instinct of their own hearts had not detected in these

words something far beyond the casual inquiry of the moment, or the cold courtesy of a prince: one fancies that even if in Reuben and the rest it had awakened and touched no responsive chord, Benjamin at least would have had some brother's thought knocking at the door of his heart, and asking, "Can a stranger feel thus and ask thus of an old man, whom he never saw?"

But, however, to return.

After these few preliminary inquiries, I said to the eldest boy, who had remained in the room, "Go, my good boy, for a few moments; I want to say a few words to your mother alone;" and on his leaving, as I turned to Mrs. Eveling, who was sitting as calmly at her work as if the only communication I could make would be some proposition for the welfare of her children, or some labour of love for others, in which I could make her useful,

"Now, Mrs. Eveling," I said, "do you know that I am going to give you much pain by performing a very plain but necessary duty. It is not so much as your minister I speak, for in that character I could well afford to leave unsaid what I am now about to say; but the very strong and earnest interest I have ever taken in your own and your children's welfare, as well as my regard to the memory of him who is no more, and, perhaps more than all, I might add, the unfeigned respect and reverence I feel for your aged father,—all these considerations induce me to speak with the

most perfect openness and candour, and to forego my own feelings, in the desire to do you good, and prevent greater distress hereafter." I then proceeded very briefly, but plainly, to state to her what had reached me during my absence, and, indeed, of what I myself had seen the germ, even before I left home; and at the conclusion I added, "Unhappily, Mrs. Eveling, it is not enough that you know it to be untrue, and that I too am confident it is so, and that no one who knows you could give a moment's credence to the tale; still no woman, no mother, must leave such a report unnoticed; for the sake of those most dear to you, for the memory of the dead, you cannot afford to rest on your own consciousness of innocence: and though I know how difficult it is to grapple with such charges, and still more, how painfully repulsive to the feelings to know that unlicensed slander has dared to breathe or insinuate such a charge, still higher motives must influence and constrain you to show that you know such miserable scandal is abroad, and that you are not afraid to meet it in open day."

A deep blush had suffused her cheeks when I began, but which had gradually subsided into deadly paleness; and when I concluded, a flood of tears relieved her swelling heart, while she said,

"Had my poor husband been alive, they would not have dared to say it; or had poor old father-in-law been still with me, respect for him would have stayed

them. But how am I to meet such charges? It seems to me, sir, that a woman's character must lie at the mercy of such people. Man has a thousand remedies, but, to a woman, the very effort to repel must give substance to the phantom, and stamp the stain more indelibly. How am I to meet the charge?"

And then, after a pause, she added with marked emphasis,

"Yes, sir, I will meet it; there is one way in which I can prove—to you at least, and to those Christian hearts who have taken so kind an interest in me and my poor children—that I am not the unworthy object these persons would seek to make me out. It is true, the world may not receive such a denial—more probably they will laugh it to scorn, but I know it will be recorded on high to my acquittal of such a charge."

There was a conscious flush of high disdain in every look as she spoke, with yet such a subdued demeanour of humility as made me catch with eagerness at her offer, and I asked what her purpose was; but her reply was,

"I cannot now explain myself,—my proof must be delayed a few days; may I tax your continued confidence till then?"

"Assuredly," I replied, "my visit to-day has been one of kindness alone, and I have neither right nor inclination, and certainly no intention, to forestall your own time, or hurry your own purposes. *I* need no conviction of the groundlessness of such a charge."

I do not deny, however, that something like a feeling of deep anxiety was uppermost in my mind: it was, as I have said, in no degree mingled with personal doubt or apprehension; but still, I said to myself, would the world receive the refutation, would it approve the evidence, and give in its verdict of acquittal? I was most anxious to know the nature of her appeal. The next Sabbath, however, solved the difficulty. It was the period of the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and among the communicants on that day, in her usual place, was Mary Eveling. As I approached her in her turn with the consecrated memorials of her Lord's body broken and His blood shed for her sake, and for the remission of her sins, her face, which was usually bent in lowly reverence, as she received the sacred elements in her hands, was now raised to mine, and though, like the pious Hannah, she uttered no word, and her lips gave no audible sound, yet the very motion of those lips seemed to say, as plainly as if words had spoken, "Thou, Lord, knowest all things."

I know not what the world might have said in its courts as to the admission of such a proof, but this I know, I would have staked my life on the innocence of

Mary Eveling.

THOMAS BRADLEY.

ONE of the most regular attendants at my church was the individual whose name heads the present narrative. He occupied no higher station in society than that of a day-labourer: early morning saw him at his toil, and late evening alone withdrew him from his task. A large family added to his cares, while it diminished his pittance; but his earnings were regularly brought home at the week's close, and every enjoyment he had was shared with those around his humble board. His children at the school, too, testified to the care which their parents took of them; they were regular in their attendance, punctual to the moment, cleanly in their appearance, and ready in their lessons. Added to this, THOMAS BRADLEY had the good word both of his employer and his neighbours. Though most people are unhappily too ready to find or pick a hole in their neighbour's coat, no one had even an insinua-

tion to hint against this unoffending being, and all were glad and ready to designate "Neighbour Bradley" as a civil, hard-working, honest man.

As I have said above, he was also a devout and regular observer of the Sabbath, not only in his attendance on the stated and public ordinances of the day, but, I had every reason to believe, in those more private communings with his GOD, in his own chamber and in the bosom of his family, which render the day a day indeed of holy rest, a Sabbath from sin as well as from weariness and labour. It was not merely the cessation from the daily routine of toil which he enjoyed, but the refreshment and renewal of strength which his spirit experienced in the holy exercises of public and private worship, and the opportunities it afforded for that more extended and prolonged intercourse with his wife and children, which the week-days' occupations so marred and interrupted.

The poet Gray, in his "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," and still more truthfully, Burns, in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," have given a sweet picture of a labouring man's return home to his humble cottage at the close of his day's work, when "the blazing hearth is burning," and "the busy house-wife" preparing the evening meal, while his children run forth at the accustomed hour to anticipate his return, and, as it were, secure the first embrace; while the wee one, too young to toddle forth on such an errand, the moment that he enters and takes his seat, climbs upon

his knees to put in her claim too for the envied kiss. I have often witnessed something very like such a scene as this, and whenever it has met my eyes, I have said to myself, "There is softened soil in that man's heart on which to work and sow seed;" and I have generally found it true, that a loving father is the most accessible and impressible of human beings. And, no doubt, many a labouring man has felt his day's toil repaid by such a welcome as this, and has thanked GOD for such sunshine on his lowly home. But sweet as all this is, and strongly as it binds heart to heart by the endearing links of filial and parental love, it admits not of that longer intercourse which the Sabbath brings round, and that quiet, domestic, invaluable training which pious parents so borrow from the Sunday's ordinances, when

> "The sire turns o'er with patriarchal grace
> The big ha' Bible, ance his father's pride."

THOMAS BRADLEY therefore, grateful as he was even for the scanty enjoyments of his home on the six days, especially prized and welcomed the seventh, as bringing him into that contact with his little ones, which he never could manage amid the interruptions and claims of daily labour. No man more truly realized than he that

> "A Sabbath well spent
> Brings a week of content."

It was therefore a very natural supposition which I

entertained, that I should find THOMAS BRADLEY among the regular communicants at the Lord's Supper. I never doubted that one who so enjoyed the spiritual food of the ordinary Sabbath services, would sit down with far keener relish to that banquet, where more especially the Lord's banner over us is LOVE, and where every token reminds us how "GOD *so* loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." For the first time or two that BRADLEY had not joined us, I concluded that some unforeseen hindrance had occurred, which would not happen again, and his absence, therefore, made but little impression on me; but it happened a second and a third time, and I could not but wonder that he had apparently so ill timed his arrangements, particularly as he was still punctual in his attendance at the previous service; and I therefore simply remarked to him one day, when I met him in his work, that I hoped he would manage better next time.

But I was disappointed; the morning arrived, the holy feast was spread, and all were invited to taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and assured how welcome every guest would be that came in love and faith. At the conclusion of the sermon, many, far many more than I could have wished, arose and withdrew; some even with grey hairs, whose span was nearly closed, hastening outwards, as indifferently as if no voice of love was calling after them, "Turn ye,

turn ye, for why will you die?" And to my surprise BRADLEY too again joined the retiring throng, though, from his downcast look, it was evident that his heart and conscience would have detained his parting steps, and that he at least heard a voice saying unto him, "Will *you* also go away?" He seemed as though he would have lingered among the worshippers, had not some prevailing cause overpowered his better feelings; and I made a silent resolution to lose no time in investigating the reason of a conduct which would have perplexed as much as it pained me, had I not often met with the various suggestions which an evil heart of unbelief has stirred up to bar the sinner's access to a throne of grace, in the very ordinance which the Saviour of sinners so mercifully appointed for them.

The same evening saw me at BRADLEY'S cottage, for I was aware that if I did not avail myself of the leisure which the Sabbath afforded, his six days' employments would throw a serious impediment in my way. It is a sad obstacle which an agricultural parish, and, perhaps, a manufacturing one still more painfully, presents to that more lengthened intercourse with the very class which the heart of a minister so especially desires to reach, and which can alone be productive of lasting good. He may preach to them from his pulpit, he may leave a message for them at their own homes, he may drop a word in season as he meets them in his walks; but unless he

can catch them at their own "ingle nook," sit down as friend with friend by their side, and win, I had almost said coax, them into something like freedom and unreserve, he will find that he has never got beyond the door-sill, and each visit will just begin where the first began, and end where the first ended —at the mere threshold of his heart. He may, it is true, in many an instance find the working man at home at his dinner-hour; but an interruption then would be as unseasonable as unprofitable. And a minister who chose such an hour for his visits would very soon, and very justly, find the truth of the old saying, that "it is ill stepping between a hungry man and his meal." In the evening, again, after the day's labours are over, I have generally found that a working man has some little objects of his own to attend to—his patch of ground to dig, his fence to be mended, his shoes to be cobbled, or some errand or job to do for his wife—and that ministerial visits at that time, as a rule, are unwelcome. There are, again, seasons of sickness; and oh! how dear and valuable they are, none can tell but those who have ministered at the bedsides of the sick and suffering, and have been privileged to speak words of comfort to them, and to lead the tired and fainting spirit to Him who alone can heal! But still seasons of sickness are sad and painful scenes, where no preliminary work has been done, no seed sown, or no foundation laid; and where the whole process of spiritual tillage, from the break-

ing up of the hard and callous fallow, has to be gone through, and where the minister is more often looked upon as the harbinger of death than the messenger of peace. The Sabbath is therefore the minister's most favourable season of intercourse; and yet, unhappily, it is too often the season when his own exhausted frame and wearied mind more needs repose than the continuance of exciting labours and anxiety. However, at the period I am speaking of, it was not so, and I therefore sought BRADLEY'S cottage at the hour I thought most available for my purpose.

I found him at home as I expected I should; he was seated at a table with a glimmering candle on it, opposite himself was his wife, and around were their three elder children with their Bibles before them, while a larger and somewhat more thumbed volume was spread before the father. It was a picture of Sabbath repose, on which a Christian minister might love to gaze; and happy beyond comparison would our peasantry be, if every cottager's home in the land could witness a like Sabbath-eve.

A chubby-cheeked, flaxen-haired boy, about ten years of age, was reading very accurately and distinctly, and on glancing over his shoulder I saw that the 26th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel was the portion of Scripture selected. A movement to arise had been made on my first entrance, but a word from me had kept them in their seats, and the little fellow proceeded:

"I found him at home, as I expected I should; he was seated at the table, opposite himself his wife, and around were their three elder children, with their Bibles before them."—P. 110.

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body." It was a passage so opportune to my purpose, and had been, no doubt, suggested by the occurrence of the day, that I could not help breaking in with the question of holy Philip, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" and as my little chubby friend was naturally enough too perplexed to afford me a reply, I turned to the father, and said,

"Do you, Bradley, practise what you read?"

He understood my meaning, for he replied with some degree of confusion,

"Ah, sir, I know what you are at. I was sure you would blame me, but indeed I am not fit."

"It may be so, but will that be a valid excuse for absence? Is not the invitation addressed to *all*—'Drink ye *all* of it,'" and I laid my finger on the word. "But," I added, "you are mistaken; I came not to blame, I came to reason with you, to calm your apprehension, to remove your scruples; and if I found you unfit, to pray with you that GOD'S grace may render you fit to be a communicant. I will not deny that I was grieved to find you among those who turned their backs upon a dying Saviour's ordinance; but as I do not believe that you did so without cause or from indifference, I am come in kindness, not in rebuke.

"Now then," I continued, taking a seat as I spoke, "let us reason together. You say you are not fit; do you mean, that you are conscious to yourself of indulging in some secret hidden sin, in which you are still persevering, wilfully and habitually persevering, and which you have not resolution to root out?"

"God forbid, sir! I am indeed a grievous sinner, I know, but I trust not a wilful one, for I do strive and pray that the Lord will enable me to do what is right; but the Sacrament is such an awful thing, and I am sure I am not worthy."

"I quite agree with you there, Bradley, you are *not* worthy, nor am I, nor any one among those who knelt at that table to-day. Our language, our confession was, that 'we were unworthy to gather up the crumbs under our Master's table;' and even after we had received the blessed elements, we still acknowledged that we were '*unworthy* through our manifold sins to offer any sacrifice.' If unworthiness therefore is to close the door against us, we must be all shut out; and yet we are sure this cannot be right, for we are *all* commanded to come: there is no exception against any, but those who shut the door against themselves by wilful impenitency and continuance in sin. But now, Bradley," I added, "let us argue on your own ground, and let me ask you, when do you expect that you shall become worthy? Will it be

when you have disobeyed the command a few years longer, and turned your back some scores more times on a positive injunction of your Saviour? Is that the process by which you expect to attain your proposed worthiness? Or will it be when a dying bed extorts from you a hurried and unsatisfying acceptance of the rite, with a vain and unavailing regret that you have delayed so long?"

"No, sir, I hope not to drive it off till then; but I trust, as I grow older, I shall grow better."

"I hope so, too, with all my heart: there is no such thing as standing still in the Christian's path; we must be up and doing, growing, and that daily, in grace and in knowledge. It is one of the peculiarities of spiritual life, that the more advanced in years, the more vigorous life becomes; the older the tree grows, the more abundantly it bears, bringing forth fruit, as the Psalmist says, in old age; the nearer the sun is to its setting, the more brilliant its light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. So that I do expect and hope that every day and every year will be not only strengthening the things that may be ready to die, but bringing out and developing some new grace and attainment which had not previously begun to grow.

"But let us examine your 'trust' as relates to the present matter. I fear you will find that you are setting up some idol of your own, rather than looking to that finished work and righteousness of the Saviour

in whom you stand complete. You acknowledge your present unworthiness,—you cannot feel it too strongly, you cannot lie too low in the dust before GOD; but when you add your intentions of waiting till some future time shall have rendered you more worthy to kneel at the Lord's table, are you not trusting to something of your own, to a hope of being able to bring something in your hands of your own doing to offer to GOD, and thereby rendering your service more acceptable to Him? In a word, are you not in reality saying to yourself, 'I will render myself more deserving of the Lord's favour by a few more years of fidelity and obedience, and then, peradventure, He will not reject me;" whereas His own word tells us, 'our sufficiency is of Him,' and that 'without Him we can do nothing.'"

"You wrong me, sir," said Bradley hurriedly, "I don't think I can do it of myself; I am sure however I can't."

"And yet," I replied, "you are acting as if you thought you could; your actions are at variance with your professions; you acknowledge your inability of yourself to do anything acceptable to GOD, and yet are actually striving in your own strength to work out some way of acceptance with Him, and at the same time debarring yourself from one of the very means of grace for attaining a spirit of holiness. But, Bradley," I continued, "let us examine this question of *unworthiness* a little more fully; it so often

meets me as an objection, that I am quite willing to believe that in your case, as in many others, it is urged in perfect sincerity, and is really a stumbling-block in the way of many well-intentioned Christians. Now, you can answer a few plain questions, which will bring us somewhat on the way.

"Whom did our Lord declare that He came to call to repentance?"

"Sinners."

"And whom did He say He came to heal?"

"The sick."

"Quite true, but there were some of whom our Lord said that they needed no repentance, nor the aid of the Physician; who could those be? Are there any of Adam's race, think you, in that happy plight, as to have no cause for sorrow, no need of healing?"

"Why, no, sir; this Bible says," laying his hand reverently on the book before him, "'There is no difference, for that all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD.' I do n't think as how there could be any that needed no repentance. I 'm sure I 'm not one of them."

"And I 'm sure I 'm not," added Mrs. Bradley.

"No, nor I either," I replied; "but there are a great many now-a-days, as well as the Pharisees in our Lord's days, who think they need none, and would scorn to apply to the Physician, as if they were poor sickly creatures."

"Aye, sir, there be many such, I fear," was Bradley's answer.

"Well then, Bradley, we have arrived at *the first* stage on our road—that the sentence of condemnation reaches to all, and that the invitation of mercy is addressed to all, because all need it, though there are some who think they have no need of it. Now then let me next ask, who, do you think, composed that little band of guests on that night when our Lord first instituted this holy feast? Would you not class them among the sinners whom Jesus came to save—among the sick whom He came to heal?"

"Why, sir, they must have been sinners."

"We cannot doubt it; they were children of Adam, as well as we; inheritors of his sin, his ruin, his death; men of like passions with ourselves, subject to the same infirmities: the sentence had gone forth against them, even as against us. Here, then, we reach the *second* stage of our argument—that the Lord's Supper, when first instituted, was instituted for sinners,—for those who were conscious they were such, who felt the burden of their sin, who recognised and acknowledged Jesus Christ as the only Deliverer from it, the only Physician who could heal their souls; and who therefore had, and pretended to have, no worthiness of their own to entitle them to the distinction of being invited as guests at their Lord's Supper."

"It seems so, sir," was the reply.

"And yet, Bradley, though called as sinners,

though invited as such, they were not to sit down as such. They came, indeed, as sinners, but they did not come *in their sins*. As Moses and Joshua, when they drew nigh to holy ground, were commanded to put off their shoes, that nothing unclean might defile the spot whereon they stood; so are those who approach the Lord, whether in this or in any other ordinance, to draw nigh unto Him with clean hands and a clean heart. They were to cast aside, as it were, their own poor, 'filthy garments;' but what then? were they to come in their nakedness? Certainly not. Were they, like the foolish virgins in the parable, to go and buy for themselves better and more suitable garments? where could they go, and where could they find the means wherewith to purchase them? No, no, my poor friend; the whole process is beautifully and truly represented to us in the prophet Zechariah, under the character of Joshua the high priest."

I then turned to the third chapter, and read as follows:

"And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto

those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."

"Here then, Bradley," I said, as I closed the book, "here is a faithful picture of you, of me, and of every follower of the Lord Jesus. We are standing before the Lord, earnestly desiring and longing to come nearer to Him; but we look at our 'filthy garments,' and are abashed and ashamed, and afraid to draw nigh. Satan, too, stands at our right hand, ready to resist us and thrust us back, and says, 'What! are *you* thinking to go in in that unseemly dress?—you have no right nor business there: stand back, sinner, *you are not fit.*' Is not that, Bradley, the very language you yourself used when I entered your cottage, '*I am not fit.*' You see where it comes from, whose suggestion it is, even his, who is the father of lies, but who, blessed be GOD, can no more prevail against us than he did against Joshua. It is true, in yourself you are not fit,—in that Satan is quite right; but when he goes on to add, that you are on that account shut out, or would persuade you to go away and seek, and stay away till you find, some better garments of your own, he says that which he has no warrant to say, and no power to enforce. So sure as you are but willing to be freed from these filthy garments, so sure as you once per-

ceive their loathsomeness, and earnestly covet to be found in a better righteousness than your own, so sure will the promise be fulfilled to you, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of garment.'

"Here then," I said, "is *the last* stage of our argument—that the worthiness required is not our own, but Christ's; willingness on our part, worthiness on Christ's. Now it really seems to me, Bradley, that this is a very plain and simple statement, so plain that a wayfaring man need not err therein, and so simple that he who runs may read. All are sinners; the ordinance therefore of the Lord's Supper was necessarily instituted for sinners; and for those sinners the Lord of the feast, of His own free-will and love, has Himself provided the very garment in which each may come and sit down at His table, and be accepted and approved as welcome guests."

BRADLEY did not seem inclined to make any reply when I stopped; he was evidently conning over the argument in his own mind; so I continued,

"The very same line of argument, Bradley, is pursued by our Lord Himself in the parable of the Marriage Supper, only that the Lord adds to it the fearful doom of one who presumed to intrude in his own unfitting dress. Who were the guests that were invited to that feast?" I asked; "were they not the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind?—a goodly company, we may well believe, in the estimation of

a self-righteous Pharisee, who might, perhaps, point the scorning finger, and cast the deriding sneer, while he cried out, 'GOD! I thank thee I am not as these;' or as he passed by and looked in, might have said, as was said on a somewhat similar occasion, 'Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners, such as these?'

"But let us proceed. The servants, as they had been commanded, had gone out into the highways and byways and hedgerows, and brought in these poor, degraded, and despised outcasts. Do you think, Bradley, that they were likely to be in fitting attire to sit down at a king's feast, at the marriage banquet of his son?"

"Why no, sir; there must have been a deal of rags and tatters among them."

"What then was to be done? They were without the means of procuring a change of dress; in all probability they had no money among them, or, if they had, where were they to go and buy robes befitting the occasion? and yet the king, when he should come in to see the guests, would expect to see them clad in proper attire. What then, I again ask, was to be done? why, the very thing that was done. The king knew their inability to help themselves,—he knew their poverty-stricken and destitute condition; the invitation had been given, 'without money and without price;' and he therefore himself provided fitting robes for them. A wedding garment was

given to each; and when the king saw his guests thus clothed, thus provided from his own stores, his eye rested upon them in complacency, and he was satisfied.

"Now, Bradley," I continued, "let us apply this parable. It is true that, in its primary signification, our Lord meant to signify by it the passing by of the Jewish nation, who disdained the rich offers of the gospel feast, and the calling in of the Gentiles, so aptly represented by the blind, the halt, and the maimed; but, though this be one of its meanings, we are equally warranted to apply it to the condition of the whole human family. Are there none now-a-days who make light of the invitation to the supper of the Lord? Are there none who turn their backs upon it, and with equal contempt and slight go straightway to their farms, their merchandise, and their homes, as things preferable in their estimation? Are there none who forget the awful denunciation, 'Behold, ye *despisers*, and wonder, and perish'? Alas! it is so continually, it was so in our own church to-day, it will be so to the end of time. Men will get themselves immersed in the cares and business of the world, will prefer their farms, their oxen, and their horses, their merchandise and counting-houses, their sensual gratifications, to Him who is more precious than rubies or fine gold: and over them the sentence still hangs unrepealed, 'None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.' These, Bradley, if not

strictly the self-righteous and the whole, who make no account of a Saviour, are yet those who look with indifference, if not contempt, on the salvation provided for them, who may be supposed to say within themselves, 'Why should we regard or care for the delicacies of a king's feast? we have good enough at home; let us eat, drink, and be merry there, without the restraint and formality of a royal banquet.'

"These then are passed by, or rather pass themselves by; they turn aside, and see no beauty in the King that they should desire him, no honour in the invitation that they should accept it.

"But is the banquet therefore to be without guests? Is that marriage supper of the Lamb, prepared in the everlasting counsels of Omnipotent Love, to be disregarded of all, and the guest-chamber continue empty? Oh no! the work of Jesus shall be accomplished; He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. There are still in the highways and by-lanes of human life myriads of poor hungering outcasts, desiring to be fed even with the crumbs which fall from the King's table. How rich, how overwhelming then would appear the mercy and condescension, if the doors were suddenly thrown open, and they were bidden to enter in and eat, without money and without price! And yet so it is. Can any invitation run more broadly, more comprehensively, than the gospel call. 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and

eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.' What! do any tarry? do any hesitate? Does one say, 'I am unclean'? Be it so; but hear what your King himself says, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' 'My blood cleanseth from all sin.' 'There is a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness;' wash in that, and though your sin be as deep and festering as the leprosy of Naaman, you shall be clean. Does another say, 'I am full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores; from the sole of my foot, even unto the crown of my head, there is no whole part in me.' Hear again what Jesus saith, 'I will come and heal thee.' Or, do you look on your soiled and tattered garments, and draw back ashamed? what saith your Father and your GOD? 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.'

"Oh, Bradley," I added, in deep emotion, "be not faithless, but believing."

"But, sir, the parable tells us of one who was found there without a wedding-garment; and you have yourself spoken of his fearful doom. I am quite sure that he was unworthy to be there; and that is what I fear for myself."

"Yes, Bradley, the parable does tell us of the man you speak of; and certainly a fearful doom was his: but I do not think his case will apply to yours."

"How so, sir?" he asked.

"Why, reflect for a moment on the condition in which all these guests were found, when they were first invited. Were they not the blind, the halt, the maimed, the crippled, and the destitute, the loathsome and the filthy; or, as you yourself described them, full of rags and tatters?"

"Yes, sir, I should imagine that was the case with them all."

"Well, then, we decided, did we not? that in that condition they were not fit nor worthy to sit down at the table of the King; that some change must be wrought in them, before they could be admitted as guests there; that change they had neither the power nor the means to work in themselves, and, in this their need, the King Himself did that which alone could meet their case. He provided the means of cleansing—the change of garment,—in fact, all was of His providing; free mercy and love from first to last. Mercy, that spread the feast; mercy, that sent the invitation; mercy, that looked upon them in their destitute condition; mercy, that supplied the means of admission; mercy, that came in as they sat at meat, and approved the work of its own hands in all, save one unhappy being."

"Ah, sir, that one!" was the reply.

"Yes, my poor friend, that one was rejected and cast into outer darkness, not because he was more unworthy than the rest, for in that respect they were all alike,—not because he had never been invited, for the message had gone to him as well as the rest,—not because he was more in rags and tatters than the others, for the parable, I think, leads us to suppose, that if there was any difference, he was in better plight than they. But you know that even among beggars there is pride, and this poor wretch disdained to come on a par or level with the needy creatures around him; he thought his own dress sufficiently good, and therefore rejected that which was provided for him; and it would appear that it was sufficiently decent to pass muster and deceive the eyes of the servants and attendants, for he seems to have taken his seat unquestioned among the guests. But there was another Eye, which seeth not as man seeth, there was another scrutiny, which searcheth the very hearts and reins, which detected at an instant glance the pride and naughtiness of his heart, and before which he shrunk abashed and speechless. It must strike you, I have no doubt, Bradley, as something most outrageously presumptuous and ignorant that a poor creature like this should be so wedded to his own unseemly dress, as to reject the far more glorious and costly robe which was offered him."

"It does indeed."

"But does not the same case meet us every day,

Bradley, of men who are clinging to their own poor miserable doings; of the self-righteous who think they have no need of repentance; of the whole, who think there is nothing the matter with them, and therefore seek not the healing of the great Physician. In the sight of God we all are but as the mendicants of the highways, as the blind, the halt, and the maimed; and though one or more among us may have a somewhat fairer dress in the eyes of man, yet in *His* eyes they are all but filthy rags, and we must cast off, even to the very shreds, the garment spotted by the flesh, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ and the robe of His righteousness alone. If we reject this, if we think ourselves in ourselves good enough, or even if we think that some portion at least may be decent enough, and that our Saviour will provide what is deficient, instead of going to Him for all, we are but acting over again the conduct of this unhappy man, and his doom will be ours."

"There is one thing, sir," said Bradley, "which I don't understand clearly. You said just now that willingness was what was required on our parts; now this man seems to have been willing enough, and yet he was cast out," and he sighed deeply as he uttered the last words.

"Yes, Bradley," I replied, "he was willing enough to receive the advantages, but he was not willing to comply with the terms; he was willing enough to sit down as a guest, but he was unwilling to come in as

a beggar. It is not the crown, but the cross which offends such. Our Lord tells us of many in his day, who cried, 'Lord, Lord,' willingly enough, but still did not the things which He commanded. The willingness required of us is entire and unreserved, a surrender, not only of the heart and its affections, but of its prejudices and preconceived notions; not only of its habits and indulgences, but of its conceits and opinions. It is such a laying hold of Christ, as influenced Peter on the yielding wave, when he cried, 'Lord, save me, I perish.' It is such a grasp as Jacob held by, when he said, 'I will not let Thee go, unless Thou bless me;' a conviction that Christ is all in all, and that the slightest relaxation in the hold would cause us to lose our grasp. It is a determination to sell all, to lose all, to count all but dross and dung so that we may win Christ. Such an one is willing, nay, in one sense he is worthy also; as St. Paul calls it, 'walking worthy of GOD,' that is, he is walking suitably to the high hopes and privileges to which GOD has called him. He comes to the Lord's Supper, not in the poor shreds and tatters of his own righteousness, but he puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, and is clothed in His righteousness; or, as the apostle elsewhere expresses it, 'he puts off the old man, which is corrupt, and puts on the new man, which after GOD is created in righteousness and true holiness.'

"It is in these His appointed ordinances that GOD

more especially delights to meet His people; it is to these ordinances He has annexed a peculiar and appropriate blessing; and he who abstains from that spiritual food, which is meat indeed and drink indeed, because he thinks himself unworthy to eat and drink, does in reality fall into two most sad and grievous errors, as dangerous to himself as dishonouring to GOD. In the first place, he narrows the broad and comprehensive foundation on which GOD has rested man's salvation, even the finished work of Jesus, and is building on the sandy basis of man's works and man's merits, as if in himself there was or could be something to recommend him to GOD; and, in the next place, it does grievous dishonour to GOD in virtually making Him the author of evil, and His commands an occasion of sin. You acknowledge your obligation to obey His commands, you profess to believe His word: those commands enjoin you to do this in remembrance of Him, and that word promises a blessing to all who obey. And yet, with belief on your lips, infidelity is in your heart; and you act as if GOD had laid the injunction on you as a trap to insnare your soul into some deep and unpardonable sin. Is not this to have a most unworthy and unbecoming suspicion of GOD, to insinuate, with the unprofitable servant in the parable, that He expects to gather where He has not strawed, and to reap where He has not sown; that He claims service, where the service will displease, and must injure the servant, or

that, like Pharaoh, He exacts a duty, while He withholds the power to fulfil it."

I here paused for a few seconds, and then turning to the chubby-cheeked boy by whose side I had taken my seat, I said,

"Let this child suggest another argument;" and I turned to him and said,

"Now, Willie, my boy, tell me, how many sacraments Christ hath ordained in his Church?"

"Two only," was his ready reply.

"Very well, and which are they?"

"Baptism and the Supper of the Lord."

"Quite right, my little man." I then turned to his father, and asked as if in ignorance, "By the by, Bradley, has this child ever been baptized?"

"To be sure he has, sir; do you think I would neglect that?"

"I don't know," I said; "this boy of yours has told us that Christ has ordained two sacraments only in His Church. They both rest on the same foundation, are both ordered by the same authority, and both have an equal value attached to them; and yet I know from my own eyesight this morning, as well as your own confession, that you have neglected the one; why then may you not have equally neglected the other?"

He was apparently struck by the argument, as one that had not occurred to him before, for he made no reply; but his wife, not catching the drift of the re-

mark, and wishing to excuse him as well as herself from what she deemed a charge of negligence, said,

"I am sure, sir, you wrong Bradley and me in this: we were always anxious to have our children christened as early as possible; and you know that you christened our last little one yourself, a very short time after GOD gave her to us."

"I know it, Mrs. Bradley," I replied, "and I was quite sure that my question respecting this little boy by my side would be answered as it has been. I knew that this child had been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. I knew that he had been thereby grafted into the body of Christ's Church, and adopted into the Redeemer's family. But herein is the difference: your husband has been more merciful to his child than to his own soul, though they are both equally valuable in the sight of GOD, both equally redeemed by the same Saviour, who instituted and ordained the sacrament of His Supper as equally binding on His people as the sacrament of Baptism. And yet he shudders at, and you earnestly repel the charge, or rather the bare idea, of having neglected the one, while his whole life has been, I will not say a wilful, but a melancholy disobedience to the other. Is not this a sad inconsistency? May not the Lord say to you, as He said to the unprofitable servant, 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee'?"

"I did not know, sir," BRADLEY replied, "that

baptism was placed on the same footing with the sacrament."

"Your own way of speaking," I answered—"a way, indeed, unhappily too common—may have led to your misconstruction. You have called the Lord's Supper '*the sacrament*,' as if it was the one only sacrament, and as if baptism had not an equal right and title to the same name. But, as you have heard your child say, there are two sacraments in Christ's Church, the sacrament of Baptism, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It misleads therefore to say, 'the sacrament,' without its appropriate addition, because, as I told you just now, they are both entitled to equal reverence in the Christian's sight, as being alike ordinances of his dear and loving Master. Indeed, if any argument could be founded on priority of institution, or which was first ordained, the Lord's Supper, you know, would take precedence, being appointed before our blessed Saviour's crucifixion, the other after his resurrection from the dead. But it would be wrong from this circumstance to give the one any superiority over the other: they both rest on the same foundation, the will and appointment of Him who is our Lord and Master; and the same feelings which led you with such eagerness to disclaim the charge of disobedience to the one ought assuredly to influence you in the other. The one, Bradley, is the seal of admission into the covenant, the other is the fruition or enjoyment of all the privileges of that covenant;

or, to put it in plainer language, to obey the one and disobey the other is as though you knocked at a friend's door, and when it was opened unto you, and you saw the master's smiling welcome, and heard his kindly greeting, bidding you freely enter, you turned upon your back and walked away.

"Bradley," I continued, "we may go further, and stand on higher ground. It is called the Lord's *Supper*, because it was at that meal, on the eventful evening which preceded His dying agonies, that He instituted this holy feast, and because we are welcomed and looked on as guests at His table—worms of the earth admitted into fellowship and communion with Him who is Lord of lords and King of kings! But such is the gracious condescension of our Master, such His love, such His touching anxiety for our souls, that He reverses, as it were, the order, and deigns to be *our* guest. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open unto me, I will come in to him, and *will sup with him*, and he with me.' 'It is the voice of our Beloved that knocketh, and saith, Open unto me.' We may, we must, indeed, say with the humble centurion, 'Lord, I am not *worthy* that Thou shouldest come under my roof:' but what is His own sweet and precious promise? 'If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' Nay, more than this, knowing our nakedness and deep poverty and ina-

bility of ourselves to help ourselves, He brings with Him, and offers to us, the wedding-robe to clothe us, even the garment of His own righteousness. Who then is a Lord like unto our Lord, or who is a God like unto our GOD? Blessed indeed is he who hath the Lord for his GOD; yea, happy are the people that are in such a case.

"May I not say to you, Bradley, in the tone of touching sorrow and rebuke which our Lord used to His disciples, 'Will you also go away?' May He give you His grace and Spirit to say, with the earnestness and sincerity of Peter, 'Lord! to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"

I was affected even to tears by my own earnestness, and I arose hastily, as if to bid the family good night; but, anticipating my own intentions, Bradley said,

"Will you not, sir, offer a prayer for us and with us, that GOD may be over our dwelling to-night, and that your words may be blessed to us?"

The proposition, as coming from himself, was unexpected, but most gratifying, as an evidence that the soil on which I had been labouring was ready to receive the seed; and I therefore instantly said, as I fell upon my knees, "Let us pray"—words indeed too often used in unmeaning indifference or careless formality, but, in the present instance, seeming to fall, in the Psalmist's words, as the dew that fell on Hermon, or that on the hill of Sion, or "as rain upon

the mown grass." At once every knee was bent, every lip was hushed, the little hands of the children were clasped and raised to heaven, the face of the mother was buried in her hands and bowed upon the chair, while the father of the family, gazing for an instant around on those whom GOD had given to him, lifted his eyes to heaven with an expression which seemed to say, "I have sinned; be merciful unto my sin, for it is great."

When we arose from our knees, I said,

"Bradley, I trust this sacrifice of prayer and praise to-night will arise to heaven, and, through the merciful intercession of our Redeemer, return with healing in its wings; and that our prayer has been set forth as that evening sacrifice, which GOD appointed for His people of old."

"I trust," was the reply, "GOD will spare me, and give me His grace and strength to remember and practise the lesson I have this day learned."

"In His hands," I replied, "are the issues of life and death; but remember, should your life be spared to another commemoration of the Lord's Supper, the memory of this evening will arise in judgment against you, if you are again found among those who turn their backs on the Lord's table."

The whole family continued standing and listening with such apparent interest and earnestness, that, without taking my seat again, but still standing at the little table, on which the open Bibles were rest-

ing, I could not resist adding a few parting words ere I turned to go, and I therefore said,

"Bradley, you have seen, nay, you have yourself confessed, in the words of Scripture, that in the sight of GOD the whole world lieth in wickedness; that there is not one righteous, for that all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD. The charge is universal; it does not take in you, and leave me out; it does not take in me, and leave Paul out. *He* indeed felt himself the chief of sinners; and the more thoroughly any one becomes acquainted with the requirements of the law of GOD, acknowledging it to be in itself holy, just, and good,—nay, the more he strives to keep that law, the more persuaded is he of his utter helplessness and incapacity to keep it, or to stand before GOD on the plea of a perfect and unsinning obedience. But that law has a two-fold character, a double office to perform; it first acts as a judge, sits on the seat of justice, and ratifies the verdict of 'Guilty' on every soul of man. But when it has once performed this office, and the convicted soul cries out, 'What shall I do to be saved?' then the law steps down, as it were, from its seat of majesty, lays aside its terrors, and, with a look of love and pity, becomes a school-master to lead us to Christ. It was in this condition that our Lord's apostles—that little band who formed the first guests at the Lord's Supper—were. The law had passed sentence on them, even as it does on us; and it had, too, led them to Christ;

they had forsaken all and followed Him, and Peter had but a short time before declared in his own and companions' names, 'Lord! to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' It was not simply because they were sinners, it was not merely because they were helpless and perishing, that they were admitted, but it was in their three-fold character—as sinners, as helpless and perishing, and, as the climax and top-stone of all, brought nigh to Christ, and looking unto Him who not only had the words of eternal life, but was and is in Himself Life—'the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' And it is the same grace of GOD which has now appeared unto you, which now invites you, and bids you cast away your fears, and come unto Him that you may be saved. And will you, Bradley, reject that mercy? No, rather let me hope that henceforth your words will be, 'Lord! to whom should I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' And now, good night, and the blessing of the Lord be with you."

I need hardly add, that the name of THOMAS BRADLEY was mingled with more than usual earnestness in the private supplications of that night. Such prayers are among the most affecting and consolatory rewards of a Christian minister's labours; they invest him with a privilege which it is most blessed to exercise, and Christian charity finds her largest scope when she lifts up the strong cry of supplication and intercession for those committed to her care. The recol-

lections of that night's pleadings in behalf of poor THOMAS BRADLEY still come across me with grateful feelings, and, though not heard in the sense in which they were offered, I can still trust and believe that they were accepted in the full spirit of that promise which annexes so large an answer to the prayer of faith, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive."

I know not that I ought to detain the reader with an account of poor BRADLEY'S death, but it spoke so loudly at the time,—it does so even now,—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might;" "Be ye also ready, for ye know not at what hour your Lord cometh,"—that I trust I shall be excused the addition of a few pages.

It was only two or three days afterwards, certainly not a week, that I was walking through the village on some errand to a neighbouring cottage, and at no great distance from my own door, when I saw some men running after me, and making hurried signs for me to stop. The sight and their calls immediately arrested my steps, as I at once surmised that some accident had occurred; but the reader may guess the astounding shock which I received, when the words "Bradley's killed, sir," were gasped forth from the breathless, horror-struck being who had first reached me. I did not, I could not, believe my own ears, and I asked in a bewildered tone, "Who? what? Bradley?—killed?—impossible."

"No, no, sir," said one; "it 's Thomas Bradley sure enough, I lifted him up myself."

"There may be yet life in him; where is he? where did you leave him?" and I immediately began to hasten in the direction from whence the men had come: but—

"It 's ow'er true, worse luck, sir," said Will Norton; "there wa' n't an atom of breath in him, when we lifted him up."

At the moment I felt as if I myself should have fainted, and I laid my arm and leaned my head on the shoulders of one of the men, while I gasped out "Stop a moment," and endeavoured to recall my thoughts, so stunned was I at the sudden awfulness of the intelligence. In a few moments I succeeded, and then turning to Norton, who was his next neighbour, I calmly said, "How did it happen? what was he doing?"

It appeared that on the morning of that day the poor man had been working in a stone quarry, and a large mass of stone, incautiously undermined, had suddenly detached itself and fallen on him, literally crushing life out of him. His companions instantly set to work to extricate him, in the vain hope that he might be saved; but their own strength was insufficient, and they had to send here and send there for help and means, and so some considerable time elapsed, and when the bleeding and mangled body was at length raised, not a sign of life remained; and in-

deed, in all probability, from the immense weight of stone which had slipped and fallen on him, death must have been instantaneous, and suffering none. A cart had therefore been procured, and the corpse was even now on its road to the village, while these two or three had hastily run on before to break the event to her who, in the morning, was a happy and contented wife, and now, ere evening, a bereaved and a sorrowing widow: and no doubt they were thankful that they had so opportunely fallen in with me, that the painful office might devolve on me rather than on themselves. A widow! alas! what a sound of destitution is in that word of woe, when it first strikes upon the ear! My heart bled as the scene of grief and anguish and distraction presented itself to my imagination, and for a moment, a brief moment, a selfish wish flashed across my mind that I had been out of hearing, and the harrowing duty had remained with the first-comers.

But "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" was the Christian minister's duty, the Christian apostle's injunction,—and I therefore proceeded with a heavy heart towards the humble dwelling, where, so shortly before, we had all knelt in holy prayer, and where he, who then bowed himself in prostrate acknowledgment of guiltiness before GOD, was about to be brought back a lifeless corpse, while his spirit had returned to GOD who gave it.

Evil intelligence travels quickly. Mrs. Bradley

had already received some intimation of her heavy misfortune, and, ere I reached her door, she was rushing forth with distracting, heart-rending cries of "Oh my husband, my poor husband, my poor husband!" and in her tumult of despair would have rushed by me to seek and see the bleeding corpse, but I put forth my hand and laid it upon her arm to detain her, while I said,

"Mrs. Bradley, do not go; return with me."

"No, no, sir, I must go, I must see him;" and she would have hurried on.

"You shall see him," I said, "but not now." It was a case in which some little resistance to her will was necessary, and I added, "Indeed, you must not go."

"It is cruel to keep me from my husband."

"No," I said, "it is mercy, it is kindness; come back with me to your own house, or rather," as the thought flashed through my mind, "step in here to Mrs. Norton's: they are bringing your husband home, and you had far better wait here, than go to seek, and it may be miss him. I will stay with you till he comes."

She knew not the full extent of her loss, and she fancied that her presence might yet save him, or that she might receive a lingering gaze of recognition, or the last token of love from his dying lips. Alas! I had to tell her, she was even then a widow!

I once had, in the course of similar duties, the me-

lancholy task of breaking to a widow the tidings that she had been made such by the suicidal act of her husband, and at the time I had thought that the most distressing moment of my life; but, bitter as that moment was, there was something in the present event which seemed to paralyse all my attempts at consolation, and the recollection of the preceding Sabbath evening, though in reality a source of deep gratitude when reviewed in calmer mood, added to the intensity of the first burst of sorrow. There was a solemn pause for a few seconds after we had entered the cottage, but at last I said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath now taken away;" can you, Mrs. Bradley, say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord"?

She only sobbed convulsively and wrung her hands, so I added, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good. He has said, 'Let thy widows trust in me,' and be assured His promise will never fail."

"Ah! my poor children!" was the burst of genuine sorrow. The chord was now touched: I whispered to Mrs. Norton, and in two or three minutes her baby was brought in from her own cottage, and taking it in my arms and laying it in its mother's lap, I said, "He is a Father of the fatherless also." Nature answered to the call, the widow's tears burst forth in unrestrained fondness over the little innocent, and as she clasped it to her bosom, she seemed to feel that she was not utterly bereaved.

The most painful part of the scene was in the ar-

rival of the mangled corpse; and I was anxious to spare the feelings of the poor woman from the shock of seeing the remains of her husband till death, and such a death, had been disarmed of its most distressing appearance in the decent arrangement of the body. This was a difficult task to manage, for grief has its tenacity and will hardly be denied; but at length all was done which respect for the dead and feeling for the living could dictate; and then leading her to her own door, with the promise of an early call on the morrow, I returned home to review the events of the day, and to meditate with holy awe on the mysterious dispensations of the Lord.

The promise of the preceding evening, it may easily be imagined, was neither forgotten nor neglected; and it was a source of great thankfulness to find that the violent grief of the first shock had subsided into calmer feeling and more subdued resignation to the will of Him who had wounded, and who alone could heal. Our conversation was long and solemn, and it was with deep emotion I heard from Mrs. Bradley, that on the morning of the day on which my lowly friend had been summoned to his account, he had arisen peculiarly early, and had spent a longer time than usual at his Bible, before he proceeded to his last toil; and, as an evidence of the feelings of his heart, when summoned to his morning meal, he still lingered, and at last closing the book, said, "Jesus is meat indeed; Jesus is drink indeed."

With Jesus on his lips, and Jesus in his heart, he went forth to his labour till the evening; but ere the evening closed, he was, I humbly hope, with the Jesus whom he loved!

I would only, in conclusion, earnestly and affectionately urge upon those who may read in poor BRADLEY'S scruples a transcript of their own, whose feet have, from year to year, turned away from the Lord's table, while yet their conscience has reproached them every time for doing so, the danger of thus trifling with their convictions. Such trifling is, in fact, neither more nor less than resistance to GOD'S Holy Spirit; and who can say whether such resistance will not lead to His final withdrawing. It was not so, indeed, in the present case, but still the privilege was denied of being a meet partaker in that holy communion on earth; and had life and that blessed privilege been vouchsafed, no doubt BRADLEY might have said to *his* wife, as was actually said by another on his dying bed to his, "We have indeed lived very happily together, but we have *missed much happiness:* we have been strangers to *true* happiness; and were we to live our lives over again, we should be infinitely more happy in loving and serving GOD than ever we have been before." *

Our Church, with much tenderness and judgment, requires of those who are perplexed with scruples to seek comfort and counsel from their appointed minis-

* "Perfect Peace," or Memoir of J. W. Howell, Esq.

ter, and I need not say how many an evangelist, how many a willing Philip, a godly minister, this favoured land produces, who would be glad to join himself to such, walk with them side by side, and lead them to drink from the same fountain of living waters, which has relieved their own thirst. And even though this may not be so, still no humble, earnest seeker after truth and righteousness ever sought in vain. There is One wiser than the wisest, even the unerring Spirit Himself, who will guide into all truth, and peace, and joy in believing.

HENRY BLANDFORD.

CHAPTER I.

HENRY BLANDFORD was a farmer of considerable opulence in our little village. He united with his employment as a tiller of the soil the not unusual trade of a horse-dealer, and in the latter character especially was a constant attendant on all the fairs and markets, both in the neighbourhood and far and wide. Long prescription and, it may be, somewhat of hard measure, has generally affixed to the character of the horse-dealer an unenviable stigma; and no doubt there are mysteries in the trade, which afford facilities to the dishonest, and temptations to the unscrupulous. But such was not the case with him of whom I am now writing, nor did I ever hear—and there were many who would have been but too glad to have repeated—any slur on the honesty and fair dealing of HENRY BLANDFORD. There was

another trait, too, in his character which reflected much credit on him, considering the temptations to which his pursuits exposed him. He was a strictly sober man, and, during a long course of years through which he travelled the country round, visiting every fair and market, and bargaining with every dealer, he was never known to be even what is mildly called "disguised in liquor." He was also, in the common acceptation of the word, a steady Churchman; that is, he came regularly once, sometimes twice, on the Sabbath to his parish church, had a goodly looking Prayer Book, a stentorian voice for psalmody, and never slept—save during the sermon. His family and domestic arrangements were also managed with regularity, and there was an air of neatness and tidiness about his house, his farm-yard, with its sheds and out-buildings, and his grounds, which betokened the vigilant attention and watchful eye of a master who both knew how to order, and to see his orders obeyed.

Thus, then, I have described HENRY BLANDFORD as he really was, and as all allowed him to be, honest and industrious, temperate and sober, a punctilious attendant on his church, and a prudent, careful, and active regulator of his household. And yet with all this he was, I fear, very far from being a Christian in spirit, as he was in name. Many a one may, perhaps, exclaim at the harshness of this judgment; he himself at one time would have loudly done so, and accused his

minister of injustice and wrong, who had so falsified his character. And yet, through GOD's mercy, he lived to see and acknowledge its truth, and to bewail with unfeigned contrition and repentance his long years of alienation and spiritual darkness: and though in his latter days the hand of GOD was heavy upon him, and he long kicked against the pricks, the stubborn heart was at length bowed, and he yielded himself in humble submission and resignation to his Father's rod, and lay quiet beneath His chastening hand.

But I must not forestall my purpose. Having described HENRY BLANDFORD in his more exemplary character, I must in truth add, that he was a hard-hearted man; hard-hearted, too, upon principle. He was far from sullen or morose, or even unkind in his general deportment; in society he had the reputation of a good-tempered man, and under his own roof was no niggard of hospitality; and, in fact, felt a pride in that rude abundance and hearty welcome which marked a rich man's board; but he had no conception of that principle which would gather up the fragments, or scatter the crumbs on a poor man's table, far less of that charity which suffereth long and is kind, and ever ready to stretch out a helping hand to one in difficulty or distress. Having raised himself into considerable affluence by undeviating integrity and persevering industry, he had no compassion for those whose harder fate it was to struggle with untoward fortune; or if he did not always attribute their

narrow circumstances to indolence and mismanagement, he fully believed that the poor had no right nor reason to complain, so long as actual starvation was not their lot. If their bellies were filled, he heeded not, though it were with the husks which the swine did eat; and himself a man whose iron and gigantic frame had never known the wearying depression of sickness, he looked upon illness as a plea for laziness, and would often task exhausted strength to its utmost. And when a workman or a labourer fell ill, or even met with an accident, in his service, so far from pitying the sufferer, or extending the slightest aid to him or his family, he would look upon himself as the aggrieved and injured one in being deprived of the service which he had hired. And yet, as I have said, he was not an unkind man in his general behaviour; he had his joke with his neighbour at market or his customers at the fair, and though I have no doubt that to deal with him taxed all a man's shrewdness and wits, yet when a bargain was once concluded, every man felt that though he might have bought dearly, yet he ran no risk of dishonest or unfair treatment at the hands of HENRY BLANDFORD. He always too had his retort ready, and was ready to carry it off with a loud laugh, as if his withers were unwrung.

"Why, Mr. Blandford," said a customer to him one day, who was bargaining hard for some diminution of price, "you are a bit of a screw."

"And you are a bit of a nipper," was the quick reply, with that uproarious laugh, in which the by-standers readily joined, to the discomfiture of his opponent. And yet with all this humour, and almost merry-heartedness, he could not understand the utility or beauty of a kind word to a fellow-creature in affliction; and the pathetic remark of the poor Scottish peasant would have sounded as Hebrew or Chaldee to his heart and ears, "It is not the bit nor the sup, but the look o' kindness that gars them digest sae weel."

In the usual routine of parish dignities it fell to his lot to be overseer of the poor; and a hard time they had of it, not so much in actual suffering, for that of course was obviated by judicious interference, but in the difficulties which he ever threw in the way, and the harshness with which he doled out relief. If they asked for bread, he would quote them an Act of Parliament; if they pleaded poverty and suffering, he threatened a magistrate; and I verily believe that no man, without positive injustice and wrong, ever quitted an odious office with more of odium, or whose abdication of authority and retirement into private life was hailed with more of jubilee and delight.* Nor was there partiality in his dealings; he had no favourites to whom he showed kindness to the exclusion of others,—all were equally

* This was, of course, before the introduction of the new Poor Law system.

under his ban; and even his own uncle, whom the vicissitudes of life had reduced to the condition of a parish-pauper, received his pittance of relief with as niggard a hand as the most indifferent and distant claimant. I once, indeed, quoted to him the apostolic injunction regarding provision for one's own; but the rebuke fell unheeded, for he exclaimed, as altogether unconscious of its application, "That 's my maxim, sir." And when I would have brought the point more home, he could not comprehend how the ties of relationship extended beyond the pale of his own house. His own roof, in fact, bounded all his ideas of kindred and of charity!

It was certainly more his misfortune than his error, that his mind had never been regulated nor expanded by education; and a successful career through life, instead of opening and softening a naturally rough and somewhat callous heart, had hardened prejudice into obstinacy, and obstinacy into what is vulgarly but expressively called *doggedness*. Certain truisms had taken possession of his intellect, which he looked upon as the concentration of all worldly wisdom and shrewdness, and which had so long held undisputed dominion over his mind, that argument had no chance of dislodging them; and, in fact, reasoning, like the storm on the traveller's cloak, only served to tighten the grasp with which they were held.

It may well be imagined, therefore, that the humble, self-denying doctrines of the Gospel found no en-

trance into his barred and closed heart; and though he never treated spiritual remonstrances with scorn or insult when they did reach him, he yet contrived to evade them as much as he could, and it was quite evident that they were altogether subjects of perfect indifference, with which he thought he had little or nothing to do; and if not outwardly offended, he was at least surprised that his minister could imagine that he, of all men, needed either warning or rebuke. It was not indeed often that opportunities presented themselves, of which a minister could judiciously avail himself; his engagements abroad necessarily occupied much of his time, his farm and his merchandise together too exclusively absorbed his thoughts, even if he had not been persuaded that religion was only a Sunday duty. On the Sabbath morn his best clothes and his Prayer-book were brought out together, and at night they were laid by together till the next Sabbath put them in requisition; and though a portly folio Bible occupied a conspicuous place on a side-table in the best parlour, it was more used as a convenient repository for odd bills and memorandums, than as a treasury from which truer riches could be gathered. Nor is there want of charity in this description; many a parish in England can present a similar picture; and Henry Blandford was, alas! only a type of a very numerous class.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was, however, a time when it was brought home to HENRY BLANDFORD'S experience that he was not beyond the reach of suffering; and though the season of sorrow, to all outward appearance, passed away without its fruits, yet who can tell in what mysterious and imperceptible way the seed was even then sown, which was to ripen in GOD'S own time. At first, indeed, he seemed to harden himself under the affliction, as if an unkind and unjust measure of suffering had been allotted to him; and his reasonings tended to the conviction of himself, if not of others, that in wrath, and not in mercy, had the Lord visited him.

The affliction to which I now allude was the death of his eldest daughter, an amiable and intelligent girl of sixteen, who died after a few days' apparently slight illness, and when no tokens of a fatal termination had prepared the parents' hearts for so sudden a bereavement. I called at the house after the event, to offer such sympathy as a parent's heart could receive; the father, however, at the time of my visit was in his fields,—occupation, no doubt, soothed his grief, for, as Mrs. Blandford observed, "The master took it sorely to heart,"—nor did he return till my visit was concluded. On the day of the funeral, I

was, according to custom, invited to attend and precede the body to the grave: of course on that day I knew the father would be there, and it was therefore with much anxiety, as well as earnest prayer that the affliction—and I well knew how great it was—might be overruled and sanctified to his good, that I proceeded to his house. It was the first interruption, if I may so call it, to his unbroken career of good fortune and success; it was the first time he had felt and realized a hand more powerful than his own, that had smitten down something which he had built up and looked upon as exclusively his own, and belonging solely to himself; it was the first time that death had so unmistakeably presented himself beneath his own roof, and carried off, as he thought, without leave or licence, the most precious treasure of his household. It was therefore with thoughtful step and anxious heart that I drew near to the house of mourning.

There is something peculiarly solemn in the house of death, and few can enter its precincts without being, for the time at least, subdued by the touching scene. The darkened windows, as you approach the house, give painful notice of the event, as if the world and its mockeries were excluded,—as if the grief were such that it were wished no stranger should intermeddle with it, and no prying eye look too closely on the sobbing broken hearts within, and that the spirit might hold more serious and undisturbed communion

with Him who is the Lord of life and death. The half-opened door cautiously admits each silent comer; the stealthy tread, the sorrowing look, and the whispered greeting, all tell of a home which the Lord hath smitten.

On entering the little parlour on one side of the narrow passage, I found Mr. and Mrs. Blandford, with other members of their family, and a few friends and relatives, who had assembled on the mournful occasion, and were waiting in silent sorrow for the summons of the undertaker. Mr. Blandford neither spoke nor rose as I entered, but his handkerchief covered his face, as if he were ashamed of the tears that moistened his rugged cheeks; so I at once went up to him and said,

"I have not seen you, Mr. Blandford, since your late affliction; but I trust that He who sent the blow has given strength to bear it."

"I do n't know, sir; it 's a hard trial to lose a child so young, and so sudden too."

"It is a trial, indeed, and a hard one to unassisted nature," I replied; "but you have heard of one who, in far deeper sorrow even than yours, only said, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!' I hope you have had grace to say the same!"

He looked up, as if not comprehending, or rather, perhaps, not attending to the words; so I added,

"I hope, Mr. Blandford, you have sought and found

comfort from Him who has wounded, and who alone can heal, and that this sorrow, bitter as it no doubt is for the present, may be overruled to some wise and sanctifying end. He is a GOD of love, even when He afflicts."

"It may be so; but I do n't see much love in robbing me of my poor child;" and the father sobbed aloud.

"Oh! Mr. Blandford, you must not, you must not indeed, say that GOD has robbed you. Children are a gift that cometh of the Lord, and surely He may resume the gift when He sees fit."

"A gift 's a gift, for all that," was his reply.

"But not in the sense in which man bestows a gift on his fellow-man. The Lord's gifts are but loans. Health is a gift of GOD; and yet how often does He suspend the blessing, when He has some gracious purpose to execute. Life is equally a gift, and yet you see that it does not tarry with us for ever. Years pass onwards—childhood becomes youth, youth turns to manhood, manhood soon decays into old age, and then we drop into the grave."

"Oh! that 's quite natural, sir, and if my child had lived to old age, we should n't have been here to mourn for her, or we should n't have thought it hard. But it 's quite contrary to nature for parents to follow their children to the grave."

"But not quite contrary to experience, at any rate, Mr. Blandford," I said. "When poor Widow Blunt's

child was taken from her, the other day, though she was the only child of her mother, you said, you remember, that it was a great mercy."

"Aye, so that was; for she was poor, and the parish had to maintain it; but my child was a burden to no one, and I 'm sure we grudged her nothing."

"Of your affection to your child, Mr. Blandford, no one can entertain a doubt, and yet the same affection should save you from repining that she is so early removed from this world of sin and sorrow."

"Why, sir," said Mr. Blandford, in a tone of reproach, if not of anger, "you do n't mean to say that this child, so good and dutiful, who never gave us a moment's distress till now, had any sin; and as to sorrow, I 'm sure, if money could have bought her happiness, she should never have known sorrow."

"Mr. Blandford," I replied, "it were unkind at this moment to enter on the question, but surely you remember the text, 'There is no difference, *all* have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD:' that word 'all' takes in you and me, and each one here to-day, as well as your dear departed one; and as to sorrow, your own experience to-day teaches that neither wealth nor affection can avert it, if we would."

As he did not at the moment reply, I continued, addressing myself as much to the party assembled as to the parents—

"Our great end and aim should be to be looking

beyond the world, and setting our affections on the things of that eternal world, where, as there will be no more sin, so will there be no more sorrow; where, as the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin, so will GOD Himself wipe away all tears from our eyes." And then turning to the father, I added,

"I can well believe, Mr. Blandford, that at the present moment your heart, so full of tenderness and love and regret for your dear child, is perhaps rebelling against this dispensation, and more apt to regard it as an evidence of wrath than of mercy. But still His Word says, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth;' and one who had been long and sorely tried, and one of whose bitterest sorrows was for a beloved son prematurely cut off, has left it on record, as his own experience, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' May your own experience, my dear sir, of this and every affliction with which it may please the Lord to visit you, lead to a similar result and acknowledgment!"

At this moment it was announced that all was ready. The poor father started up, and hastily looked round for the mother to take her arm, but she was not there; and he hurried into the passage, where he found her bathed in tears, and with her head leaning on her child's coffin, as if she would have pierced its gloomy lid to take one glance, before it was finally removed from beneath the roof which had sheltered all her child's earthly existence. Mr. Blandford put

his arm round her waist, and, gently raising her, said, with more tenderness than I had ever seen him exhibit,

"Come, come, missus, tears won't bring her back; and if they could, perhaps, as the minister said, she might live to feel the sorrow we now feel; no, no, there's no sorrow in the grave."

The funeral procession was soon on its way. During the portion of the service within the church, Mr. Blandford's face was not visible, and whatever might be his emotions, they were effectually concealed from sight. In the church-yard, however, and as he stood by the side of the grave, surrounded as he was by many who, he perhaps felt conscious, could bear him but little good-will, he stood erect, and though his gaze was intently fixed on the coffin, and his lips quivered as it slowly descended into the grave, and he heard the clods sound hollowly on the lid, not a tear fell from his eyes, and he stood like a firm-rooted tree, which the wind might indeed shake, but could not uproot.

Of course I saw no more of Mr. Blandford that day.

CHAPTER III.

Some few days after the event mentioned in the last chapter, I accidentally fell in with Mr. Blandford, as he was superintending some operations on his farm, and his greeting was, as it had always been, cordial and hearty. At the moment, indeed, so cheerful was his voice, that I might have fancied sorrow had been forgotten; and so no doubt at the instant it was, but almost immediately afterwards, as if his thoughts had been awakened to the loss he had sustained, he said,

"Our last meeting, sir, was in a different place."

"It was indeed," I replied; "but we are told in the Bible that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. I am afraid, however, such is not the usual opinion of the world, nor perhaps yours."

"Why no," he said, "I can't see much comfort in a house of mourning, and I 'm sure I do n't want to see mine again as it was the other day. I do n't care much about feasting, there is n't always much sense in that; but as for mourning, it 's a queer taste to prefer that."

"You mistake the meaning of the quotation, Mr. Blandford. The wise man, who uttered the remark I have just repeated, did not mean to assert that in itself sorrow was preferable to joy, or that if the

choice were set before him, he would prefer mourning to mirth; but he was looking to the end of both, and what he meant to assert was, that in its results sanctified sorrow was more desirable than unsanctified revelry."

"I do n't understand you; I hope you do n't mean to say as how there is revelry in my house; it 's true, I see a good deal of jollification, as they call it, where I go, but I never could abide it, and I 'm sure no one can say as how they ever saw or heard anything wrong in my house."

"I never heard that there was, Mr. Blandford, and when I alluded to unsanctified revelry, I did not for a moment mean to insinuate that you shared in such scenes. I have known you too long and too well, Mr. Blandford, for such a thought as that to enter my mind. My remark was simply a general one, founded on experience as well as Scripture truth, that a religious sorrow is better than an irreligious mirth."

"Well, now, I ca n't for the life of me see how sorrow in any shape can be good," answered Mr. Blandford. "You do n't mean to say, and you do n't want me to believe, that what missus and I have gone through lately can be good for us, or that there is any mercy in losing such a dear good child, as her that is gone."

"Indeed I do," I replied. "I do not, however, mean that such *will be* the case, but I am quite sure it *may*."

He shook his head as if to negative the probability of such an occurrence, and said,

"In my trade, sir, we should say it was not a fair bargain; the price was too high, it was n't worth the purchase-money."

"I allow," I replied, "that you are a competent judge of what you have parted with; your own heart and feelings can truly estimate the worth of what you have surrendered, or, in your own words, the amount of the purchase-money; but I do not allow that, as yet, you are any fair judge of what you are to receive in exchange. To continue the language of your trade, you have not brought your steed home, and therefore know nothing about its value and worth."

He smiled at my illustration, though, I suspect, not in the least comprehending its meaning, for he added,

"I should be a pretty horse-dealer to do that. Pig-dealers, they say, sometimes buy their articles in a poke," and he laughed as he said this; "but for my part, I like to see what I buy, aye, and to bring it home with me at once."

"I am sure, Mr. Blandford," I replied, "you will not be offended with me; you will rather look upon it as a compliment, when I say, that in your worldly dealings you are far too shrewd a man to act either a foolish or an unguarded part. Our Lord Himself, you know, has said that the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light; and I am quite sure that if you would but act

in spiritual matters with the same forecast and prudence that you do in your worldly concerns, you would soon find and feel that even the sorrows of life are sent on no fruitless errands, but that they invariably leave peace and growth of grace in the soil that is fitted to receive them.

"Look," I continued, "at that field of wheat of yours; this year at least you farmers can find little cause to grumble. You must allow the crops are most splendid; I never saw a finer piece of wheat than this."

He turned his eyes in the direction of the field, and scanned its broad and ample acres with a gratified air; but I never knew a farmer, even in the finest seasons, without some reservation, some peg on which to hang a murmur, and Mr. Blandford was no exception to the rule, so he said,

"Why yes, to be sure, it does look very tidy; there isn't much amiss, or to be said against it; but," he added, "just look down that corner by the hedge, and you 'll see there is n't much to boast of there, anyhow."

"Certainly, nothing to boast of," I replied, "but a vast deal for which to be thankful. Why, Mr. Blandford, you remind me of a man who, when somebody remarked to him, as he was digging up his potatoes, what an abundant crop he had, and how magnificent in size, replied in much your tone and manner, 'Why they bean't much amiss for that, but

then there be no little uns for the pigs.' So, my good sir, half a breadth of a somewhat scantier crop under a hedge-row does away all gratitude for the whole length and breadth of golden abundance over the rest of your field."

"Well," he said, "I must own, I don't think you'll see a prettier field of wheat in the lordship, and it does one's heart good to look at it."

"And yet had the summer's sun alone shone upon it, it would not have waved so proudly in the wind as it does now. Had it not had the wintry frost, and the dews, and the rains, as well as the sunshine, it would have been but a withered, stunted crop to what it is now. So that you see it is in natural as in spiritual things, 'all things work together for good to them that love GOD.' The 'fire and hail, the snow and vapours, and the stormy wind alike fulfil His word,' as they sweep over the earth; and so sorrow and suffering, sickness and death, are equally sent on the Lord's errands, and commissioned to do His will.

"Yes, Mr. Blandford," I continued, "that mixture of rain and sunshine, which GOD has given to your field, has brought it to the condition in which you now see it. And do you not suppose that the same method of cultivation must be equally good for that barren and rugged and stony field, the human heart? that all sunshine and prosperity would wither the growth of every blade, and that it is good for us that the Lord

occasionally sends rain and tears to water and fertilize the soil?"

"No doubt we have had some nice rains for the crops—no farmer would deny that."

"Well then, your own experience has decided right in the one case; why not in the other?"

Mr. Blandford, as I have said before, was not a man to be convinced by argument, when it suited his purpose to resist it. He had satisfied his mind, like Jonah beneath his withered gourd, that he did well to be angry with the Lord for His recent dealings with him; and though he looked with pride on his field of wheat, and acknowledged the value of the rain and sunshine as regarded his crop, it was a very different thing to admit the correctness of the argument as applied to his own feelings or his own household and family, and he therefore replied with more shrewdness than I had perhaps given him credit for—

"Why yes, the rain does good, there 's no denying that, but the rain does harm as well: I dare say you have seen in your garden, sir, and I 'm sure I have in my fields, that the weeds come up much quicker after it; so you see the rain has its mischief too."

"I shall not deny the growth of the weeds," I said, "either in my garden or the human heart; but let us do with the latter as we do with the former. I set my gardener to work, and you employ your men.

to root them out, and then the rain becomes an unmixed blessing. If we suffer them to grow in either case, the result is that which our Lord described, 'they choke the seed, and it becometh unfruitful;' but we must not lay that blame on the rain, which belongs only to the soil."

"I have often thought, what good weeds do at all; they only grow to be pulled out or hoed up, or, if not rooted out, to spoil the crops. I don't see that it's any proof of the goodness of GOD that weeds grow at all; I think we should be much better without the trouble and worry of them."

"Certainly," I replied, "weeds are no proof of the *goodness* of GOD in the sense in which you take it, though the very weeds furnish abundance of food to many of His inferior creatures; but they are at least a proof of His justice, an evidence of His hatred of sin; you do not forget that it was for man's sin the ground was cursed, that for his offence it was doomed to bring forth thorns and thistles, and that in the sweat of his brow was man to eat bread."

"Aye, aye, sir, that might be very right for him that disobeyed, but Adam lived long before the flood; and it's hard to be punished for another man's offence; that does n't strike me as justice, anyhow."

"Your remark, Mr. Blandford," I replied, "would lead me into a longer reply than perhaps you would like to listen to. That the fact is as you have stated it, the whole world bears ample evidence: there is

no spot of ground which does not send up thorns and thistles and weeds; every labourer in your fields has but to put his hand across his brow, and feel that in its sweat he is earning the bread that nourishes him; and, more than this, your own experience in your own family has furnished sad and melancholy testimony, that through our first parents death has entered into the world."

I saw a cloud partly of sorrow and of anger pass across his face, and he was about to speak, but I interrupted him and said,

"I do not say this to wound you or hurt your feelings, or to bring needlessly to your mind what I doubt not is ever present with you—the loss you have sustained; but our own senses, our own eyesight, as well as our own experience, all loudly and plainly tell us that we are at this moment suffering the penalty of Adam's transgression."

He broke in upon me here, and answered,

"That's just what I said, and I don't see the justice of it."

"I might, Mr. Blandford," I replied, "content myself with replying to you, as the apostle did to one who equally impugned the dealings of the Almighty, 'Who art thou that repliest against God? shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' But this would leave you just where you are, still unconvinced, or, rather, still rooted in your conviction that, in thus dealing with man, there is unrighteous-

ness with GOD; for that in reality is your charge against the Almighty. Bear with me therefore a few minutes longer; or rather, as I see you have finished your work here, and are probably returning home, let us walk together, and reason this matter by the way."

He readily consented, and as we proceeded I said to him, as if not meaning any reference to our previous conversation,

"Your son Henry, Mr. Blandford, is very like you; any one would know him to be your son."

"Yes, sir," said the pleased father, "he 's a chip of the old block, as we say."

"Well then, you admit," I said, "that a parent can transmit his likeness and his bodily features to his son, do you not?"

He did not much relish the admission, nor the way in which, as he thought, he had been trapped into it; he could not, however, deny it, but he immediately qualified it, by adding,

"But that 's only one generation."

"It is so," I said; "but let it suffice for the fact as far as it goes, that a father transmits to his son his own likeness. Your uncle Owen is, I believe, of your mother's family?"

"Yes! he was my mother's brother, and a poor fellow he is."

"Was he always," I asked, "in the condition in which he now is? I think I have heard that his

father once owned the farm which Mr. Abbot now occupies."

"It 's quite true, sir, and a prettier little property was n't in the whole county than when my missus' father first had it, as I have heard tell. He might have held up his head with the best among us, and his children might have been well to do in the world. But," he added, with a knowing look and a significant motion of his arm, "he had a crook in his elbow; you understand, sir, he was too fond of his glass and company, and so his land gradually slipped away from him, acre by acre, till he died a beggar, and left poor Will Owen as you now see him."

"I am afraid then, Mr. Blandford, we must extend the admission, and conclude from your account that a parent's sin can transmit its consequences to his children; and that Will Owen's father having lost his inheritance, he had none to leave his son; that having squandered the patrimony which GOD gave him, he has bequeathed only beggary to his child."

The admission was too self-evident to be denied, so he contented himself with his former restriction, that it was only one generation.

"Yes," I replied, "you are quite right, it is *at present* only one generation; but do you think poor Will has a chance of re-purchasing Mr. Abbot's farm, and will be able to leave it to his family, and so restore them again to the condition of their forefathers?"

"There 's not much chance of that, I think."

"Then we may fairly say that, through the intemperance and misconduct of their progenitor, Will Owen's family have been reduced from their rank as freeholders to the condition of labourers."

"I can't deny that, for there they are labouring in yonder field. But still, I think, Old Will might have done better, if he had n't taken somewhat to his father's habits."

"Oh! is that the case?" I said, as if not previously aware of the fact, "then I am afraid we must extend our admission further still, and allow that a father's evil nature and habits may be transmitted to his son."

I saw he was beginning to get impatient and irritable at the unexpected admissions he was compelled to make, so I added,

"Well, Mr. Blandford, we have now reached your farm-yard, and I must leave you; but, ere we part, let me in much kindness say to you, that the subject on which we have been conversing is in truth a most important one, and leads to inferences far more serious and solemn than you had imagined, or, perhaps, can comprehend at present. You see how a little train of reasoning, even on things that are daily passing before our eyes, presents truths which we hardly suspected, and affords us a very tolerable mirror, in which we may see a faithful representation of GOD'S dealings with ourselves.

"*We* are the disinherited ones, of whom poor Owen has furnished us a type; we are lying under an attainder, from the guilt and disobedience and rebellion of our parent, reduced from our rank as children of GOD to the unhappy state of children of wrath, and in ourselves as incapable as Owen himself of regaining our lost condition. But oh! how far more merciful is our Father in His dispensations than any earthly parent can be. You have acknowledged the improbability, nay, the impossibility, of Owen's regaining *his* father's forfeited inheritance. But out of our lost condition GOD has been pleased to provide a way of deliverance, and calls upon every one to come in and accept the mercy thus provided for him. It is true, Adam's sin brought in death, but Christ's obedience has brought in life. It is true, Adam's transgression left us in misery and shame and nakedness; and not only that, but, as in Owen's case, has left to us a corrupt nature and evil habits and inclinations, which have been plunging us deeper and deeper into ruin, and showing that we are not only inheritors of Adam's lost condition, but inheritors of his nature also. But in this lost and perishing condition GOD's mercy found us, and of His own love gave us life in Christ. Oh! then, instead of arraigning the justice of GOD, and demanding a reason for His dealings, and refusing His proffered mercy, let us rather go and confess our ruin, and find righteousness and eternal

life in Christ, as in Adam we found only guilt and death.

"Do you think that your poor uncle arraigns the justice of GOD, because he inherits not the property of his father; or would you uphold him if he did? When therefore *you* look on your son bearing your own likeness, or on Will Owen's family earning their daily bread by daily labour, do not hastily charge GOD with injustice, because your ground bears weeds, or because He has permitted death to enter your dwelling. So good-day to you."

He turned into his farm-yard as I spoke, and as I saw his son Henry come from beneath one of the cattle-sheds to meet him, I wondered what thoughts would cross the father's mind, as he traced in the youthful lineaments of the lad his own more rugged and sun-burnt features.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was one of Mr. Blandford's peculiarities of habit to carry about with him large sums of money. He said it was necessary in his trade, as a horse-dealer, to be always provided with the needful in case of any casual bargains falling in his way; and yet that could hardly have been his reason, for he would have been grievously offended, if any dealer or salesman within

fifty miles of his residence had doubted his word for any amount he might choose to pledge it. It might have been that he was apprehensive of insecurity in country banks; and yet even that could hardly have been his motive, for he was known to have large dealings with several. But whatever may have been the cause, or the combination of causes, still the fact was as I have stated it. I suspect, indeed, that a good deal of the pride of money mingled with the habit. He was, I am sure, far above the paltry ostentation of making a vain display with his cash, and far too shrewd to make a needless and indiscriminate exposure of the wealth he carried about with him; but it certainly engendered a spirit of rough independence, which he too frequently evidenced in an overbearing tone. And a man, who is conscious to himself that he has no need to go further than his own pocket for any sum he may require, needs much counterbalancing grace to keep him humble even before his GOD.

He was, indeed, often remonstrated with on the risk which he no doubt ran in the many journeys he took, and the late hours at which he was in the habit of returning home from the more distant fairs he attended; but even the entreaties of his own wife were unavailing to make him alter his habits. He *poohed* and *pished* at the fears expressed, prided himself on his gigantic size and strength, and fully thought himself a match for any tolerably fair en-

counter he might meet with, and, indeed, like Dandie Dinmont, of Border celebrity, would have been rather pleased than otherwise to have had, what he called, "a tussle with the chaps."

It was not very long after the conversation detailed in the preceding chapter, that a farm in the parish, belonging to an absentee landlord, but who resided at no very great distance from us, though he never or seldom came among us, was vacant; and as its situation was convenient to Mr. Blandford's present occupancy, he wished to become the tenant, and accordingly applied for it. Mr. N——, the landlord, appointed therefore a day on which he proposed to come to the village to see Mr. Blandford on the subject, and walk over the vacant farm. As the owner was an entire stranger to Mr. Blandford, and Mr. Blandford to him, he had asked me to accompany him, and accordingly, though I hardly knew the position I was to take, whether as "master of the ceremonies," or "*amicus curiæ*," or as "the tame elephant" to keep the wild one in order, I consented to his proposition.

I am afraid that at this period his feelings of grief for the loss he had even still recently sustained had materially subsided, not indeed into acquiescence with GOD'S will, when he did think of the subject; but the cares of this world had crowded upon him, his traffic and his farm occupied his thoughts, he had been absent at more than one fair, had made some successful speculations, and his mind had, in a great

degree, resumed its usual rugged and overbearing hardness.

Still to myself he was always personally civil, and even cordial, when we met, though I fancied he was more cautious than he had been wont to be in meeting me alone; and when he saw me at a distance drawing nigh towards him, he would either retreat before I could reach him, or he would call some labourer to his side, as if to give him directions in his work. On the day, however, to which I am now alluding, he either thought there could be no opening for any professional or "parson's jobation," as he reverently termed it, or he was content to run the risk in the advantages he expected from my being with him. We accordingly met at Mr. Blandford's house, and walked over the land intended to be let; nor was I sorry for the opportunity afforded of interesting an absentee in our local welfare and concerns. Everything passed off most amicably; the would-be tenant was anxious for the land, and not very niggard as to terms; the landlord was satisfied with the proposals, the management intended to be adopted, and had assented to such alterations as had been suggested. Everything was apparently settled to the satisfaction of both parties, when the owner of the land, turning to his intended tenant, said,

"There is one thing more, Mr. Blandford, to be mentioned. I am a stranger here, and you are a perfect stranger to me. I do not question your respect-

ability—I have seen quite enough to-day to convince me of that—but I think I ought to ask some information as to your responsibility."

"My what, sir?" said Mr. Blandford, with a puzzled look.

"Your responsibility—your ability to meet the rent you have proposed to give."

For a moment Mr. Blandford stared in vacant amazement; but the instant the word "*rent*" met his ear, he dived his brawny hand into his breeches-pocket, and pulling out a huge roll of dingy notes, exclaimed, "Rent, sir? there 's your rent for the next seven years, if you 'll give me interest for my money."

Mr. N—— smiled, and said,

"I am quite satisfied, Mr. Blandford; my question, however, was, I think, a natural one, and I hope I have not given you offence."

"No, no, sir, no offence; only"—and here the roll again descended into its cavern—"only I thought everybody knew Harry Blandford."

I have mentioned this anecdote as indicative of the character of the man, and not perhaps as immediately bearing upon the purposes of this narrative, though it afforded me an opportunity, of which I gladly availed myself, to insinuate a little gentle truth. The owner of the land had quitted us at the last field, the carriage which had brought him having waited for him in the lane adjoining, and Mr. Blandford and

myself walked home together. He was in excellent humour; he had gained his end, and become tenant of the farm; and what pleased him more than all, he had, to use his own phrase, "*daunted*" the stranger by his offer of the seven years' rent. His first remark was rather in a contemptuous tone—

"That chap seemed to think we poor fellows had no money."

"You certainly have convinced him to the contrary," I said.

He laughed heartily at the recollection of the scene, and added,

"I wonder what folks would have said at Horncastle, or any of them fairs, if they'd heard that Harry Blandford's means were doubted. No, no, sir; money 's the thing to get a good name by, at fair or market."

"I am, indeed, afraid," I replied, "that money is the idol of most people's devotion."

"To be sure it is," was his answer, "we are all scrambling for it, and lucky the man who gets most of it."

"I do n't know that, Mr. Blandford. It has been well and wisely said of riches, that 'there is a burden of care in getting them, fear in keeping them, temptation in using them, sorrow in losing them, and a burden of account at last to be given up concerning them.' That last item alone, one would think, would in some measure qualify the desire after them."

"I can readily see that to have no money is bad enough; but I can't see much sorrow in having it," was Mr. Blandford's answer.

"That is to say, I suppose, you would rather be Henry Blandford than Will Owen."

"To be sure," he said, "and, meaning no offence, as that chap said, you 'd rather be the parson than the clerk;" and he laughed loudly at his repartee.

"Exactly so," I said, "but if the clerk coveted the parson's larger means, and the parson hankered after the bishop's revenues, and were consequently dissatisfied with the conditions in which GOD had placed them, and were each striving to overtake the other's means, would they not be equally and alike foolish and guilty? It is the *love* of money which is blamed, —the setting an undue affection on it, which is the source of evil."

"But surely, sir, you do n't call honest industry and fair trading covetousness?" he asked.

"Far from it," I said.

"Nor," he added, as if encouraged by the admission I had made, "if I could make this thousand pounds, which I just now pulled out of my pocket, another thousand, you would not charge me with sin?"

"Certainly not," was my answer, "*for the act:* but I might very likely say, *the spirit in which it was sought* was sinful."

"I do n't see any sin in being rich," he replied.

"Nor do I; but I see much danger. I do not read in the word of GOD, 'How hardly shall they that are *poor* enter into the kingdom of GOD!' but I do read, 'How hardly shall they that are *rich!*'"

"Yes! I 've often heard you read that text, and I thought it dealing out very hard measure."

"You must not, Mr. Blandford," I replied, "consider the words as an irrevocable *sentence* harshly passed upon the rich, but as a *warning* mercifully held out to them, and in that sense it is no hard measure. It is simply as if a light were held up in a dark and slippery road to warn travellers of their danger; and if you were walking in such a path, with pits and precipices on every side, and hindrances at every step, you would, I am sure, be grateful to the hand that held up a light to guide you, or the voice that called out to you to warn you of your danger."

"I dare say I should, but I do n't see any danger. To my mind, the poor man has a deal more temptation in his way, and therefore, as you would say, in a deal more danger."

"Ah! Mr. Blandford, in this very circumstance is your greatest danger; you see no risk, you fear no danger, and you are therefore walking onwards in careless security. If you were going to Horncastle to-morrow, you would think it a foolish way of getting to the end of your journey to stop at Lincoln, and go no further; and, though you of all men are least likely to do such a thing, you would have but a

sorry opinion of the forethought or prudence of the traveller, who was setting out on a journey, and only took sufficient money to meet the expenditure of a single day, should you not?"

"Why yes," he answered; "that's not my plan, anyhow," and he smiled.

"Well then, Mr. Blandford, here is *your* danger; you too are on a journey,—travelling from this world to the next,—and what, according to your own belief, ought we to say of your folly, in making provision only for one day, the day of life, if, laying up for yourself treasure upon this earth, you should be found, when called upon to set out on the further journey, among those who are not 'rich towards GOD.'"

"I do n't understand what you mean by being rich towards GOD. GOD does not want our money."

"Certainly not, in one sense; and yet, though He claims the gold and the silver as His own, He condescends to ask it at our hands, declaring that he who giveth unto the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that He will repay it again. And you remember, I dare say, that in the enumeration of the acts of humanity and benevolence shown to those that were hungry, and thirsty, and naked, and sick, and in prison, He accounted every act of soothing sympathy, of cordial kindness, and affectionate love, as done unto Himself. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' We may call these then rich in good works."

"I have heard, sir, and I dare say you have too, that charity begins at home," said Mr. Blandford.

"So it does; but, according to your own showing, it only *begins* there; take care, Mr. Blandford, that it does not *end* there."

"I 'm sure that if I were to spend my time like that, going about to feed the hungry, and visiting the sick in this place, and the prisoner in that, my business would go to rack and ruin. I should soon bring my noble to nine-pence, as the saying is, and should n't be able to pay my debts; and it 's my maxim that 'we ought to be just before we are generous.'"

"And a very good maxim it is, Mr. Blandford," I said, "as far as it goes, but I fear, like the one you just now quoted, you do n't always read them aright. You say that 'we should be just before we are generous;' now my reading would be that 'we cannot be just unless we are generous.'"

"Well now, that 's odd, at any rate," answered Mr. Blandford. "I do n't expect people to call me over-generous, but I 'm sure there 's none of them can deny that I am just, anyhow."

"Do n't let us quote one another's practice or character," I said; "I should be sorry to illustrate my argument by referring personally to you, and perhaps equally sorry if you were to refer to me as an example. We might in that case unwittingly give each other offence, and that I 'm sure we neither

of us wish to do. But let us take the case generally; or rather," I said, "let us take the case of the young man in the Gospel, whose question to our Lord, you know, gave rise to His observation as to the difficulty of rich men entering into the kingdom of heaven. You remember the injunction to him was, 'Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.'"

"And a very hard injunction too, I think," was Mr. Blandford's instant reply. "I suspect we should have many go away as sorrowful as he, if they were called on to do the same."

"I fear we should; but then take into consideration the promise, 'Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' Here was treasure on earth in one scale, and treasure in heaven in the other: we know which he chose."

"Yes!" said Mr. Blandford, "he chose to keep what he had, and I can't blame him."

"That is, I suppose you mean, he preferred the certainty of the present to the uncertainty of the future, and consequently had no faith in the Promiser. I should therefore, at any rate, not call him rich, but poor in faith."

"I don't see as how we are called upon to give up all that we have."

"Nor are we," I answered; "but the principle is the same; and if you love your money as the young man loved his, you would be as equally unwilling to surrender it as he was, if you were called upon to do

so. It is the *love*, and not the *possession*, of money that is the root of all evil. Wealth is as much the gift of GOD as health, or strength, or life itself, and is therefore to be held as a trust from Him, not for our own exclusive benefit and enjoyment. If we selfishly employ it all on ourselves and our own families, on our own interests and advancement, we are perverting GOD'S purposes in intrusting that wealth to our stewardship, and so in one sense robbing GOD, and therefore not just: and that is what I meant by saying we could not be just unless we were generous.

Mr. Blandford was not a man to be easily repelled in argument, and he therefore returned to his point by saying,

"But if I owe money, I ought to pay my debts first?"

"Certainly. 'Owe no man anything,' is a gospel precept. But then we owe kindness and benevolence to all, and we ought to pay that as well; we owe GOD'S poor something, for He has left them in our charge, and that is one of our debts; we owe good-will to every one, for 'good-will to man' was proclaimed from heaven at the Saviour's birth; and even if our enemy hunger, we are to feed him; if he thirst, we are to give him drink. In short, Mr. Blandford, it resolves itself into this, that in setting our hearts upon riches, we are making provision only for one stage—the one day of the journey. The love of riches implies the love of the world, and where they

take possession, they bar and lock the door, and close the entrance against the love of GOD. Our affections become entangled and set on things of the earth; we are toiling and travailing, or, as you called it, 'scrambling,' for that which may quit us to-morrow, and which, at any rate, we must quit soon. He, on the contrary, whose affections are set on things above, has respect unto the recompense of the reward, and is comparatively indifferent as to the accommodations he may meet with on the road, looking indeed on every step as guided and appointed by his Father, and therefore thankful if the loving-kindness of GOD spare him from poverty and trial; but, if otherwise, content to tread the same path which He trod, who had not where to lay his head.

"And now, Mr. Blandford, we are arrived at your own door. I do not ask you to believe my word; but you ride many a lonely mile, and I would say, think of what we have been talking about, and if to meditation you will add prayer for the teaching of GOD'S Holy Spirit, you will, I doubt not, arrive at a truer estimate of the relative value of earthly and heavenly riches."

CHAPTER V.

It is unnecessary to carry my readers through the various details of Mr. Blandford's life; enough has been already narrated to give a tolerable insight into the character of the man. I therefore hasten to its close, which indeed was not so far off as the health and strength of his frame, his active life, and temperate habits would have seemed to promise. Not more than two years from the date of the conversation recorded in the preceding chapter, a report reached the village that Mr. Blandford had been knocked down and robbed in the streets of Lincoln. It was so very probable a result of his well-known habits of carrying large sums of money about him, and had been so often and so confidently predicted, that the rumour was at once credited without scruple, and, I fear I must add, with more of satisfaction than regret by many. It is true, it was added, that he had suffered severely from the attack, and was even said to have been dangerously wounded. As soon, therefore, as I heard that he had reached his home, which he did within a few hours of the report, I made a point of calling immediately to see him. I found him looking very ill and haggard, which he said arose from the severity of the blow on his head. I asked for a detail of the circumstances, and, though with some

indistinctness of utterance, he told me that he was walking, towards nightfall, along one of the streets of Lincoln on his return to his inn, when he felt a sudden blow on his head; that he staggered and fell, and knew nothing more till he found himself in a druggist's shop, to which he had been carried by some passers-by; he said there was no wound, and he supposed his hat had saved his head. I asked him if he had lost any money, and he said, "No, it was all safe;" and he accounted for this by supposing that his assailants had been disturbed, ere they had accomplished their purpose, by those who had conveyed him to the druggist's house.

His account was certainly singular, and had he been a man of less sober habits, I might have imputed it to intoxication or a fall; but his known temperance and almost abstemiousness precluded any such supposition, and I therefore said to him,

"Did you see any doctor, Mr. Blandford?"

"Yes, sir; after I somewhat recovered, I still felt queer and muzzy in the head, and so I went to one to put me to rights."

"And what did he say to you?"

"Why, he asked me if I were married, and lived far off; and when I told him, and that I had a missus at home, he said, 'Then, my good sir, my advice to you is, that you lose no time in returning home as soon as you can, and lay up there for a few days; you 'll be better nursed there than at an inn;' so

I just followed his advice, and have come back again."

The truth now began to dawn upon me that he had had a slight paralytic attack, the too probable precursor of a still severer one; his look and his speech had awakened suspicion, and the doctor's advice confirmed my apprehension, so I said to him,

"You did not see the person who attacked you, did you?"

"No; I saw no one."

"Did your hat," I asked, "show any marks of the blow?"

"Why, no; I didn't think about it at first, but when I got a little better, it occurred to me to look, and I couldn't see any mark."

"Has a thought, Mr. Blandford," I quietly but slowly asked, "ever crossed your mind that the blow was from no human hand?"

I saw his features twitch somewhat convulsively as I asked the question, and for a moment he did not answer; but at length he slowly and in an under tone uttered,

"Yes, it has."

"Well," I said, not appearing to take any further notice, "let me give you a little of my advice. You are tired, I dare say, with your ride home;—go to bed, and, above all, send for your doctor to come immediately; he may give you a composing draught, which will secure you a good night's rest. I will call

and see you in the morning, and shall hope to find you much better; so good bye to you."

Mrs. Blandford followed me from the room; and when we were out of the reach of hearing, she asked me, with tears in her eyes, what I meant, and what I thought to be the matter. I briefly told her my apprehensions, and, reïterating my injunctions to lose no time in sending for a medical man, I quitted the house.

The case was indeed as I surmised; and unhappily, with his usual obstinacy, Mr. BLANDFORD, finding himself comfortably settled at home, and safely housed under what he called "missus's eye," would not hear of the doctor being sent for till the following morning, and even irritated himself to such a degree on its being urged, that Mrs. Blandford deemed it wisest to desist from further importunity; nor, perhaps, did she herself quite understand the strong necessity of the counsel I had given. Whether medical aid could have availed to ward off or retard attack, GOD only knows; but as it was, assuredly, ere morning dawned, a second attack of far greater severity had supervened; and when I reached his house, on their hasty and alarmed summons, on the following morning, Mr. BLANDFORD was lying in his bed speechless and with distorted features. His mind, or at least his recognition, remained; for he at once knew me, and tried with painful effort to greet me, but in vain. Violent remedies had been applied, and were even then in oper-

ation, and I felt that at that moment even his minister's attendance would be distressingly intrusive, so I took his hand, and pointed upwards, and uttering one audible but brief petition for the Lord's mercy in that hour of need, I quitted the room.

I saw him again the same day, and indeed continually; but as his speech was still most inarticulate, and as it was of essential consequence that his mind should be kept as quiet as possible, little passed between us in those earlier interviews save those offices of prayer, which, however repulsed as they sometimes are at the beginning, have still that soothing, calming, anodyne character, that, like oil upon the stormy waters, the angry billow subsides into peaceful rest. I am only speaking of the outward aspect,—GOD alone reads the heart; but I have seldom found prayer by the bed-side of the sick and dying, even of the very reprobate, unacceptable, and I would hope not always unblessed in the most hopeless cases.

The strength of Mr. BLANDFORD's constitution, with able medical treatment, restored him in time to such measure of recovery as enabled him once more to leave his bed, and converse with tolerable distinctness, if not fluency; but the decree had gone forth, and the once hale and hearty man was now a hopeless paralytic cripple in his easy-chair. I have spoken simply of the natural causes of this partial restoration, such as they appeared to man; but the true cause, no doubt, was that the Lord's work was not yet accom-

plished; that He had graciously listened to the Intercessor, who had pleaded for him, that he should not be cut down, till His purpose of love and mercy was fully revealed and wrought. GOD's way was not indeed our way, nor His time our time: the proud man was still unhumbled, the hard heart still unsoftened, the impatient and rebellious will still unsubdued, and the first accents from his restored lips were those of sullen murmuring and angry repining at the Lord's dealings.

The first time that I saw him in his new position, I said to him,

"Well, Mr. Blandford, I am thankful to see you once more released from your bed."

"I might as well be there, for any good I can do," was the melancholy answer of the unregenerate heart.

"Not very long ago," I said, "I thought you would have been, ere this, in a narrower bed. Surely GOD hath dealt mercifully with you in once more raising you up, even thus far."

"I do n't see much mercy in making a cripple of me," was the hard man's answer.

"I am afraid, Mr. Blandford," I said, "that you look upon the present dispensation as, what you would call, hard measure; nor do I deny that it requires much exercise of patience, much grace and strength from above, to resign yourself calmly and unmurmuringly to the will of GOD, to exchange, even

for a time, the active habits of industrious and busy life, for the stillness and quiet of a sick-room. I am not surprised; I hardly expect that at the present moment you will see mercy in this dispensation."

"I am sure I do n't; and I do n't see who can."

"But still your lack of eyesight does not disprove the existence of the mercy; all that you have a right to say is, that you do not see it; you have no right to add, that there is therefore no mercy. If there were a blind man in this room, and I were to tell him there was a bottle of medicine on yonder table, and he were to reply, 'I do n't see it, and therefore I do n't believe it,' his lack of sight would not disprove the fact, would it? any more than if the Atheist were to say, 'I do not see GOD, and therefore I infer that there is none;' why, your own common sense would tell you that his reasoning was wrong, and that the true inference was, 'I do not see GOD, and therefore He is not visible—He is not to be seen.' So, because you do not in your present mood, or with your present eyes, see the blessing of affliction, and the mercy even of protracted suffering, is not evidence that it is not there, but merely that you have not found it out."

Mr. Blandford made no answer, so I continued,

"It is, my good sir, the case with us all as to spiritual matters; we are all naturally blind; we think, nay, we affirm that we see; but the description given of you and me, and all, in this Bible, is, 'Having our understanding darkened through the ignorance that

is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts.' And even when our eyes begin to be opened, this Word of GOD tells us that our vision is still very imperfect—'we see men as trees walking;' and Paul tells us that he whose eyes are widest open, and most thoroughly cleared of all the film of ignorance and prejudice, can only see 'as through a glass darkly.' I do not, therefore, expect that you can at present trace the purpose of the Lord's dealings with you, nor do I wonder that you see no mercy in sickness, and recognise no love in trial."

"I only see mischief and ruin," was the sullen reply; "what 's to become of my business, and who 's to see after the things? If this illness were to continue only a few days—I should not mind even a few weeks—one might perhaps manage; but I see no chance of getting better, and to be laid up here always, like a poor useless cripple, is more than I can bear." And the strong man, in the very weakness of a child, burst into tears. "I am sure, sir, you will allow that GOD has dealt very hardly with me."

"I will allow, my friend, that GOD has visited you sorely; that he has laid His hand heavily, very heavily, upon you. I am not denying the extent of your affliction, nor the heaviness of your trial. Nor do I close my eyes against its possible or, it may be, probable continuance. This book of GOD," I added, as I laid my hand on the opened Bible, "tells us that 'no chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but

grievous;' but what does it go on to say, 'nevertheless"—in spite of its grievousness, notwithstanding its bitterness—'nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.' And you remember, I doubt not, what one of old said, when GOD'S severest trials were denounced upon him and all his house, 'It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good.'"

"I won't be a hypocrite, sir; I can't say that, and I won't."

"Not yet, perhaps, Mr. Blandford; but let us pray that GOD may yet bend the stubborn heart; let us pray that, with Him who trod a far thornier road than you have to tread, and who drank of a far bitterer cup of suffering than you will have to drink, you, too, may be brought to say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done!'"

I waited for no answer, but, kneeling down, prayed for him that, in this and in everything, the same mind might be in him which was in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next time I saw Mr. BLANDFORD was certainly in no favourable light. He had procured a Bath chair from some quarter or other, and had been

"He had procured a Bath chair from some quarter or other, and had been wheeled out into the farm-yard."—Pp 192, 193.

wheeled out into the farm-yard. I heard angry words, as I approached the place, but little suspected the cause or the quarter from whence they sprung. No doubt the poor man had found, even in the comparatively short period of his illness, much neglect and carelessness, much that betokened the absence of a master's eye, and probably also somewhat that seemed to intimate they never expected that master's eye again. His temper, at all times harsh and overbearing to his work-people, and now soured by disease and irritated by misconduct, had completely given way; and as I entered the yard, the melancholy spectacle was presented of this "impotent man," in all the ungovernableness of rage, storming, blustering, bullying, and, I fear, also blaspheming.

It was useless at such a moment to reason with him, and indeed it struck me that the most effectual rebuke would be to pass onwards in sorrow and in silence. I therefore stood for a few moments, till I saw he had noticed me, and then quitted the yard, without greeting or remark.

I purposely delayed visiting him again till the evening of the following day, and I then found him occupying his former position in his easy chair. He was evidently uneasy at seeing me, and no doubt thought I had come to rebuke; but it was no part of my purpose to run any risk of irritating him by premature allusion to the scene of the day before, and my desire was rather to lead him gradually into such

a frame of mind, that he might bear the probing without wincing. I therefore quietly asked if I should read him a portion of the Holy Scriptures, and upon his assenting I selected the first part of the 5th chapter of St. John, which so touchingly tells the story of the poor cripple, who had borne *his* burden for thirty and eight years, as peculiarly appropriate to his situation, and adapted to the end I had in view. He seemed interested in the narrative, and we gradually fell into conversation.

"I selected this portion of the Gospel, Mr. Blandford, as the narrative seems appropriate to your present condition, and tells of one who through many a weary year was in a plight very similar to your own, —perhaps I should say in many respects worse than yours, for he apparently had no one to care for him, or wait upon him, while you have but to say to wife or child, 'Go, and they go,' or to a servant, 'Do this, and he doeth it.'"

Mr. Blandford's reply, however, at once showed upon what portion of the story he had chiefly fastened, and on which his own thoughts were ever dwelling; for,

"Do you think, sir, I shall be made whole?" was the ready question.

"I do, if you earnestly desire it, and seek for healing. The prophet Jeremiah had no doubt on the question, when he cried, 'Heal me, and I shall be healed.'"

"Well, I'm sure I desire it, and earnestly too."

"Perhaps, Mr. Blandford," I said, "we are speaking of two different things. You are probably alluding to the disease of the body."

"To be sure, I am," was his reply; "it's never out of my mind, day nor night."

"I am not competent then to decide on your question. GOD has not delegated to His ministers the issues of life and death, of health and sickness. He has reserved those in His own hands, and, though we may make them the subjects of our prayers and earnest supplications both for ourselves and others, we dare not pronounce His will concerning them; and it is our duty as well as our wisdom, as indeed we have no other alternative, but to leave all these events to His sovereign will and disposal."

"But he healed this poor man; why then may he not heal me?"

"Yes," I said, "at the end of thirty and eight years He healed this paralysed cripple; but the consolation to be derived from this story, as it strikes me, is, *not* the prospect of ultimate recovery,—which was indeed granted in this case under circumstances and for purposes which can never occur again,—but the blessed conviction and consolation, that our case is known to GOD,—'Jesus *knew* that he had been now a long time in this condition,'—and that even protracted suffering in no degree implies the withdrawal

or abatement of the Lord's mercy and loving-kindness."

"But thirty-eight years is a long, long time to suffer. I dare say the poor man had given himself up to despair long before."

"Hardly that," I answered, "for we find him still lingering among those who were waiting and hoping for a cure. I have no doubt that he must have experienced many wearisome hours, many moments of heavy despondency, and of that sickness of heart which arises from hope delayed; and it may be that, in the earlier period of his affliction, he might have even murmured, as you now murmur, against God's dealings with him, and perhaps have given way to angry revilings of the unkindness and selfishness of those around him, who had so neglected him in his destitution. It would seem, however," I continued, "as if affliction had long since softened the bitterness of his spirit, if such there had ever been, and had wrought its perfect work; for to the question of the Saviour, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' he exaggerates not the unkindness of others, he imputes no selfish motives, he inveighs not against their cruelty and neglect, he makes no mention of the lengthened years of his own suffering, and attempts not to excite compassion in the heart of his questioner by any statement of his own melancholy case, but simply states the fact that he had no one to help him, and

that ere his crippled limbs could drag him to the pool, another had forestalled his purpose, and stepped in before him."

"Ah, sir, thirty-eight years is a wearisome time to take to learn a lesson in."

"It is indeed!" I said; "but oh the long-suffering patience of the Lord, that can endure for so long a period the waywardness, the obstinacy, and perverseness of those that will not learn! And when through continued teaching and discipline, line upon line, and precept upon precept, we have at length learned it, we shall then, in part at least, know the extent of that endurance. You, Mr. Blandford," I went on to say, "have scarcely had eight and thirty days of schooling and teaching, and you must not therefore wonder that, in so short a space of time, you have not mastered the lesson you were set to learn. It is said that a good man, long since gone to the saints' everlasting rest, who had long been in this school, exclaimed at the close of life, when meditating or commenting on this very story, 'I thank Thee, Lord, not for thirty and eight, but for fifty and six years, wherein Thou hast taught me thus.' And I have read of another good and holy man, lying on his bed of sickness, and, being asked which were the most comfortable days that he ever knew, cried out, 'Oh, give me my *mourning* days, give me my mourning days again, for they were the joyfullest days that ever I had.' You may remember, perhaps, a con-

versation we had together a long time ago, in which you were rather perplexed at a quotation I made from the Bible, that 'it was better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting;' but I trust, Mr. Blandford, ere long, that I may appeal to your own experience, that 'far better, and far happier too, is godly sorrow than worldly joy,' and that you too will have to give in your testimony with that of David, 'It is good for me that I have been in trouble.' I do not expect you to learn it to-day, nor to-morrow, nor perhaps for many a day. The Israelites, you know, were forty years in the wilderness learning this lesson, and never learned it after all. I fear you won't prove a very apt scholar at first."

He shook his head, and said,

"I fear not; I know I have complained, and I am afraid I do so still. At any rate, I can't see just now any mercy in GOD's dealing with me as He has done; there may be wrath, but I don't see love, anyhow."

"I don't recollect, Mr. Blandford, who it is that says that fatherly corrections are so far from being inconsistent with the love of GOD, that His love would be rather questionable without them; that they are, he says, love-tokens, not marks of hatred. I might indeed say to you in the words of Scripture, 'Wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' but if we have a complaint to make, it should be *to* GOD, and not *of* GOD;

of *our* doings, not of *His* dealings. Have you, Mr. Blandford, so complained to Him of the hardness of your heart, of your dulness in learning and understanding His will? Have you complained to Him of your murmuring spirit, of your impatient temper; that you, like one of old, are 'kicking against the pricks,' and thereby wounding your own self by your resistance, like one of your own wild and unbroken colts?"

He did not reply; so I continued,

"Ah! my friend, if such were the subject of your complaints before GOD, I would say to you, 'Complain on.' I would have you do as David did, when he poured out his complaint before Him, and showed him *all* his trouble; and then I have no doubt that Jesus would heal you too of whatsoever diseases of sin you had. He might not indeed say to you, 'Arise and walk;' but He would assuredly say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee: go in peace.' But, alas! we do not act for the soul with the same earnestness and decision that we do for the body. You know, for instance, that you are sick in body,—you see it in the crippled limb—you feel it in the aching head,—and you send for the physician, obey his orders, adopt his directions, and take his remedies. In the other case the malady is no less certain, but you know it not—you feel it not; and therefore you either call not in the great Physician, or you reject his prescriptions, and complain of them as nauseous and distasteful."

"I do n't deny, sir, that I have done many things that I ought not to have done"—

"And," I interrupted, "said many words I ought not to have said."

"Yes, that's true also; but if GOD is so extreme to mark what we have all done and said amiss, it will go hard with many of us."

"It would go hard with all, Mr. Blandford," I said, "with you and with me, with patriarchs and prophets and apostles; not one could abide the righteous scrutiny of the Lord. But it is poor wisdom to compare ourselves with our neighbours. He would be but a bungling carpenter that should go about to measure a plank with a crooked stick, instead of his own straight rule; and, be assured, it is equally bungling work to measure ourselves by the crooked lives of our fellow-sinners, instead of the straight rule of the Word of GOD.* For my own part, Mr. Blandford," I continued, "I often, in the contemplation of that event which alike awaits us all, compare myself to a subject in some Eastern country, summoned into the presence of his sovereign, to whom he must present some appropriate gift by way of homage. I suppose myself summoned into the presence of GOD, and that I too must bring before Him some one action of my life that may stand His pure and holy scrutiny. I seem to hear the prophet's voice once more sounding in my ears, 'Wherewith will you come

* Archbishop Leighton.

before the Lord, and bow yourself before the high God?'—and in my agitation and my terror, I take up, as it were, this action; and as my eye glances over it, I say to myself, 'Oh no! *this* will never do; it is too poor, too paltry, it is worth nothing.' And then I hurriedly take up another, and I look at it and say, 'Oh! *this* is too soiled and dirty, He will at once reject it;' and so I go through all the doings of a whole life, and find them all alike, and equally worthless and unfitting. Were you to do the same, could *you* find one?"

He looked at me for a moment, and then, with a deep sigh, said,

"No; not one."

"Well, but we must go farther. It is not one stainless, sinless deed, which we can never find, and therefore in that sense must go empty-handed; but we have to go with all our actions, soiled and dirty as they are; with all our thoughts, polluted as they are; and with all our words, bitter and idle as they may have been. Do you think, Mr. Blandford," and I here spoke with increased solemnity of tone, "do you think that you could take with cheerful confidence before your GOD the words and actions even of one day—of yesterday, for instance—and that GOD would say to you, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'?"

I saw his features clouding over, but not in anger, and he said,

"I dare not defend myself; I can only say, my sin has been ever before me, and I have been sorry for it ever since."

"I am glad to hear it," I said. "I have shared your sorrow; for, indeed, it grieved me to the heart to see what I saw, and to hear what I heard. It was a melancholy spectacle to see one, whom the Lord had smitten, venting his impotent rage on his fellow-worms;—it was a harrowing sound to hear such an one dealing damnation on the limbs and eyes of others, whose own limbs were powerless as he spoke, and whose own eyes had been so nearly closed in death, and employing his restored speech to curse."

I saw that he was now subdued into a real expression of sorrow; tears were standing in his eyes, and he uttered no word of justification, or even of extenuation; so I went on—

"I have spoken as I have done, Mr. Blandford, on purpose to wound. Your sin has indeed been grievous in the sight of GOD, and in the sight of man too. The example you exhibited to those poor men could only give discouragement and sorrow to those who loved GOD, as well as an occasion to others to speak reproachfully and disparagingly of the grace of GOD. Oh, Mr. Blandford!" I added, "your own recollection or hearsay may tell you of sinners who have been cut down in the midst of their sins—the drunkard in his drunkenness, the licentious in his uncleanness, and the Sabbath-breaker in his pleasure-taking;

the blasphemer has died with his oath, and the liar with his lie on his lips. Had GOD at that moment struck you with a heavier blow than He did in the streets of Lincoln, where would have been your soul?"

He was evidently deeply moved; and, after a moment's pause, he lifted up his hands as if clasped in prayer, and said,

"I have sinned! the Lord put away my sin!"

"Amen!" I fervently responded; and after a brief pause, in which I could not but hope some mental prayer from the broken and the contrite would go up before God, I said,

"But let us resume our subject, Mr. Blandford; what is a poor sinner under the circumstances I have supposed to do? he cannot disobey, he cannot evade the summons; appear he must in the presence of and before the tribunal of GOD. He may have thought himself well provided; like the guest at the king's supper, he may have passed muster before his fellow-guests, but when he really comes to view everything in the light, and weigh everything in the balance, of eternity, he finds himself destitute in his time of need. What then, I ask, is he to do? Let us look to the Word of GOD, the case is exactly described there,—the supposition of fancied wealth, the reality of utter destitution, and the only remedy that can avail."

I took up the Bible that lay before me, and turning to the third chapter of the Book of Revelation, I read to him as follows:

"Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."

"Here then, Mr. Blandford, we at once see our condition and our remedy; we think ourselves rich and increased with goods, and needing nothing, while, in reality and in the sight of GOD, we are even in our best estate poor, blind, naked, and miserable. This is the first step in religious conversion, to feel our poverty, our emptiness, our nothingness, and to go to GOD only in our character of needy, wretched beggars. And who is He that gives us this counsel? It is He who will be our Judge, even He whose blood cleanseth from all sin.

"Let us not part," I added, "without offering up our earnest supplication to GOD that He will open the eyes of our understanding, that He will take compassion on our nakedness, and clothe us with the robe of His Son's righteousness, and in our poverty will give us of the unsearchable riches of Christ."

CHAPTER VII.

I WAS one day sitting in Mr. BLANDFORD's room conversing with him, when he said to me, in reply to some remark I had made,

"Do you remember, sir, some long time ago, when you were standing with me alongside of Dean's Close, as we call it, our having some talk about thistles and weeds? I did n't think much about it then, but I suppose it stuck to me somehow, and since I have been ill I have recalled a good deal of what you then said, and though I have often thought and said that this world would be a far happier world without sickness and suffering, I suppose, like GOD's weeds, they are somehow instruments of good."

"Sickness and suffering," I replied, "were not among the original appointments of GOD. He created man in His own image, perfect, and exempt from sickness and from death. It was man's sin which brought in both; and though I remember your once saying to me—and I think it was on the occasion to which you have just alluded—that you thought it was hard to bear the consequences of another's sin, yet the Word of GOD tells us that we are not only fellow-sufferers, but fellow-sinners also: 'By one man's disobedience many (that is, all) were made *sinners*.' Had man continued holy, had he kept his first estate,

sickness and suffering and death would not have entered in; and no doubt it would have been a far happier world, had it known no sin, and therefore felt no suffering. God's Word does not say, nor do our own reason and experience tell us, that any affliction for the present is joyous, but, on the contrary, grievous; its outward aspect is repulsive, we shrink as we feel the first touch of its cold icy hand on our hearts or frames; we shudder and would fain draw back as we catch the first glimpse of the dark valley, with its gloomy shadows. But still the Word of God does say of affliction, that afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby; and I therefore think we can in reality have no doubt upon the subject, though it may be difficult to convince the judgment. For instance, if I were to assert that such a man as yourself were happier in the condition you are now in, than when you were wandering over your fields, overlooking your workmen, or riding about our lanes and roads, a never-failing attendant on fair and market, in full health and vigour and activity, I could hardly expect you to believe me; your own feelings, you would say, would give the lie to such a statement. Nor, in one sense, do I think they would judge wrongly; but the error lies in taking any one ingredient in God's discipline separately, and not looking to the end, or the result, which the whole discipline of a life is commissioned to accomplish. We are told in the Bible that '*all*

things *work together* for good to them that love GOD, and it is a mistake to take them as it were to pieces and to look at the detached portions separately, and not regard the Lord's dealings and discipline in their combined and united form."

There was a bottle of medicine standing on his table, and, as I took it up, I said, "This bottle, for instance, combines more than one substance, and you have found it beneficial in your case; but separate its ingredients, take them one by one apart from the rest, and you would probably find them, not only nauseous and useless, but most likely injurious also; it is its combination, you know, which gives efficacy to the draught. And so in the Lord's appointments to His children, we shall not only miss much of their intended blessing, but in many cases altogether neutralize them, if we consider them piecemeal. When Moses by the command of GOD recapitulated to the Israelites the dealings of the Lord with them in their wanderings through the wilderness, the language of the Almighty was not, 'Consider how I have led you this last year, how I fed you yesterday, or gave you drink to-day,' but it was, 'Remember *all the way* which the Lord thy GOD led thee these forty years in the wilderness.' 'See how, year after year, and day after day, one step after another has conduced to the mighty purpose I have in view.' And it is with us as with them. The Lord's purpose with His people is to humble them, and prove them, and show them what is in their

hearts; the great end He has in view is to bring them through the wilderness of this life to the heavenly Canaan. The first stage on life's journey is in infancy, and the last is at the grave's side. If we take, then, the events and accidents of this day's or this year's journey separately from the rest, and wait not for the result of the whole, it is as if we looked through a telescope, and closed the glass at the end. Nor, indeed, do I think we shall ever come to a right estimate of all things, till we weigh them in the balance of eternity; nor see with what beautiful accuracy the Lord has dove-tailed, as it were, incident into incident, blended the shade with the sunshine, and made tribulation work its perfect work; till we see and read them, not as here, line by line and syllable by syllable, with difficulty spelling out this, and scarcely through our tears deciphering that; but when the full and glorious light of eternity is poured upon the full page of life at once, or, as the prophet has it, 'when the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.'"

Mr. BLANDFORD still retained a good deal of his resisting and unyielding qualities, and, though much of that wall of granite within which he had encased his heart had been broken down, the old habit of antagonism and resistance still, in some slight degree, survived, though each remark that he made showed

also how gradually but surely stronghold after stronghold was being battered down, through that sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of GOD. His reply to my last remark was,

"But one can't help looking at each event separately, as it passes by; and I'm sure I have very often asked myself, when a thing has grown cross or awkward, of what possible use such an event could be, unless to put one out of humour or temper; and I don't think GOD meant that. And I don't think, sir, it was ever meant that we should not look on each event that occurs, and that of course must be separately. I am very thankful to own that I find much comfort now in dwelling on the separate events of each day, and that I think I can trace in each one something of the loving-kindness of the Lord."

"I quite agree with you," I said; "I am not for an instant denying the privilege and blessing of treasuring up and dwelling on, in mind and memory, the Lord's particular mercies and dealings, as each passes in review before one. It is one of the sweetest acts of communion of a creature with his Creator to trace His hand and working at every step. For my own part, Mr. Blandford, I could gladly set up, like the patriarchs, a commemoration altar of Bethel, or, with Samuel, an Eben-ezer, or stone of help, at every step of my pilgrimage; and I believe that every child in the Lord's family can testify to that most precious truth, that Jehovah-Jireh, or 'the Lord will provide,'

is found not only inscribed on every trial, but erected, as it were, as a sign-post at the entrance of every path of difficulty, emergency, or suffering, into which He is leading His people. And it is in this way that we arrive at correct conclusions respecting the whole, and ascertain how far the Lord has led us on our course towards the heavenly Canaan. Had David, for instance, contrasted his condition as a fugitive and an exile, hunted as a partridge on the mountains, and his life in daily peril, with his earlier condition at the court of Saul, or the tranquillity of his shepherd-life at home, he might indeed have said, as the patriarch said before him, 'All these things are against me.' His condition as an exile, taken separately, was no doubt an evil, and as such he mourned it; but as it led him onwards in his heavenward progress, humbling him, and proving him, and showing him what was in his heart, he took a brighter and a sounder view of the Lord's dealings, and has left this unhesitating testimony of his own experience and assurance, that '*All* the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.' If then *all* the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, the paths of suffering and sorrow are among them; if '*All* things shall work together for our good,' then is your present affliction working for *your* good. Paul's path, you know, led him through much affliction and suffering even to a cruel death, and yet it was he which made this remark;

nay, he goes further, and calls his heavy trials a light affliction; and though they continued through many a lengthened year, and ended only in the grave, he speaks of them as lasting 'but for a moment:' and what were they working for him? he himself tells us, 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

"It is this looking to the end, Mr. Blandford, the having the eye constantly fixed upon this termination of the journey, that enables us to estimate correctly what may promote and what may hinder our growth in grace and our walk with GOD. I think you will testify that you have thought more of GOD, and far less of the world, since your illness than, I may perhaps say, in all your previous life."

"No doubt, no doubt; but then it 's more natural to think more of GOD in a time of sickness than of health, you know."

"Yes, we may say with Archbishop Leighton, 'He that prays not till affliction comes and forces him to it is very slothful; but he that prays not in affliction is altogether senseless.' But I think, Mr. Blandford," I continued, "you have found the world and the world's cares intrude even into this chamber. When I first used to come into this room, I observed you had your chair placed so near the window that you could see what was going on in your farm-yard, and even when we were talking I noticed your eye often anxiously looking out. I see you have now

moved it away from the window, and I gather from this, either that you do not find the farm-yard so attractive as it was, or that it stirs up cares and anxieties and thoughts unsuited to such a chamber as yours."

He smiled for a moment, as he said,

"I did n't think you had been so keen-sighted, but it 's quite true. I have never had the heart to go into that yard any more; but you see a bit of the old leaven still stuck by me, and I thought I could see from the window what was going on, and give directions; but even that did not answer, it worried and vexed me, and many a time put me out of sorts, and I just said to myself, 'You had better, Harry, give it up altogether.' So I one day told missus to turn chair t' other way; and I think I have felt ever since, that the less of the world the less of sorrow and vexation."

"Well, Mr. Blandford," I said, "it is a step on the heavenward journey, in your case and with your feelings, I believe, a large one; and I can only pray that He, whose Holy Spirit has wrought even this amount of change, will bring His own work to a perfect end."

"I am afraid you give me credit for too high a motive," was his answer. "I do n't know that I had any particular motive; I merely thought it better to avoid it, and I did so."

"There was, however, a time when you would have

thought otherwise, I suspect, and when the cares and engagements of the world alone seemed to be the natural and necessary duties of life. How then do you account for this change? Have you, or could you, do you think, have worked this change in yourself?"

"Not in health, I'm sure. I did n't think about it then; there were so many other things always getting the upper hand, and wanting and waiting to be done, that I now believe we think very little of GOD in a time of busy active health,—at least, as I suppose was the case with me, we put GOD on one side for the present, till we have done our other work, and that never is done. And yet I never thought I was neglecting religion. I do n't exactly say that I thought myself what you would call a religious character, but I thought I did as much as was required of me; and as, in fact, I did a great deal more than those about me, and man could lay little to my charge, I made no doubt GOD had as little too. This illness, however, has assuredly wrought a great change in my feelings, and I begin to see things very differently to what I did."

"But," I said, "you did not bring this illness on yourself; it was the hand of GOD that sent it. It was the very last remedy you would have sought or chosen, even had you known your spiritual disease and danger. You remember how you resisted it at first, and closed your heart against the gracious message it was commissioned to deliver; and how you would

have chosen for yourself rather to have gone down to the grave at once, unprepared and unforgiven, than to linger on, as I think you termed it, 'a miserable, hopeless, helpless cripple.' The fact is, Mr. Blandford, you recognised not, you had no idea of, the voice of love with which Jesus speaks in sickness: at first no doubt it is a strange voice, and grates upon the heart and ear, and you would fain shut it out; but still the voice calls sweetly and softly,—it still continues to plead urgently and lovingly, till at length the heart, subdued and softened into love, answers, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant now heareth.' It was with you, as with that barren tree in the Lord's garden, which He ordered to be cut down as profitless and unsightly, 'Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground;' and as the sentence passed the Almighty's lips, the destroying angel went forth, and met you in the streets of Lincoln, and would have cut you down, as the Lord had bidden him, had not the compassionate Jesus interceded for you, and won for you this precious interval of respite, this salutary period of holy, undisturbed communion, in which His Holy Spirit has convinced you of sin, and led you to seek a better righteousness than your own. You remember the words in which Jesus represents Himself as pleading for the tree, 'Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it;'—'I will send my surest, trustiest messenger of suffering to him; I will myself allure him into the wilderness of his own

sick and solitary chamber, and speak comfortably to him there; and then, if it bear fruit, oh! blessed reward of the travail of my soul!'

"Well then, Mr. Blandford," I went on to say, "I think we have your testimony also, in addition to that of so many brothers and sisters in the Lord's family who have gone before you, that sickness has wrought a change in you, which health and prosperity never could have worked; and as this sickness came from GOD, the inference I think is plain, that it is GOD that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure, as you have now done. There is no one truth so clearly stated in the Bible, as that we have no power of ourselves to think anything good as of ourselves: our condition is not merely that of inability, but it is actually spiritual death—'*dead* in trespasses and sins.' And who is it that giveth life? It is the Spirit that quickeneth—it is the Spirit that giveth life."

"I do not clearly understand, sir, what is meant by our being 'dead'; can it be said of those who are actually living? I can understand a sinner dying in his sins, without any repentance, and that he *then* may be truly said to be 'dead in his trespasses and sins;' but while he lives, can he be said to be dead?"

"We have the word of GOD that it is so, and therefore the fact cannot be disputed. The Spirit of GOD, sending a message to the church at Sardis, says of it"—and I turned to the passage—"'Thou hast

a name to live, and art dead;' that is, thou art nominally reputed to live, men think of thee, speak of thee, look upon thee as living, but in my sight thou art dead; not merely *as* one dead, but actually a corpse. Now were I, Mr. Blandford, to say that such had been your case, would you esteem it a hard saying?"

"I dare say I might once have said it was 'a hard saying,' to believe that I had ever been a dead man. I do n't now see how it is made out."

"No doubt you would have both thought and said it, nor should I have wondered at it; while you took the words in their literal sense, your own senses, your own feelings, the energies of mind and body would all say, 'This cannot be.' You might truly say, 'I touch, I taste, I handle, and therefore I live.' You may, perhaps, allow there may be something approaching to truth in the assertion, now that you are thus crippled and impotent, but that it could never be true in your days of health and vigour, when early morning and late evening saw you in your fields, or hastening to fair and market, careful and care-taking: and were I to reverse the picture, and say, that in those days of buoyant health and active strength you were dead, but that now, with halting limb and crippled frame, you are beginning to live, you would perhaps say to me, as the Jews said of their prophet, 'Doth he not speak parables?' And yet, Mr. Blandford," I added, "so it is; does not the apostle say,

that 'to be carnally minded is death;' and were you not at that time immersed in all the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, pursuing the things of time with an eagerness which absorbed every thought, as if this world were to last for ever, and there were no eternity for the soul? You had, indeed, a name to live; men esteemed you a living man, they saw your body active, and performing all the functions of life and the duties of your calling, with a shrewdness and sagacity which they could not but acknowledge and admire; but they saw not your soul, that GOD was not in all your thoughts, and that you were altogether of the earth, earthy; they looked on you as one not slothful indeed in business, but they asked not, they heeded not, whether you were also 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;' they approved and spoke well of you while you were doing good to yourself, but they never spoke of you as visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping yourself unspotted from the world.

"I am not describing your character alone, Mr. Blandford," I said, "it is the character of the far larger part of mankind, the pains-taking, early-rising, late-taking-rest men of the world. You were but one of a numerous class living solely to yourself and self-interest, and not to GOD."

"I do n't deny," was his answer, "that on week and working days I have thought far more of the world and worldly things than of GOD, but I think

you yourself will own that I was a regular church-goer most Sundays."

"Oh yes, Mr. Blandford," I said, "a church-*goer*, I readily allow. The Lord said the same thing of Israel, 'This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;' and so again in this passage"—and I kept turning over the leaves of the Bible before me—"here it is, 'They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouths they show much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness.' There are many church-goers in all ages—I was going to call them lip-and-knee-servers, but I am afraid the latter posture is little known and observed, and the lip alone seems to be the sole agent in the worship, if indeed even that is occupied; and one would almost suppose that the chief end and aim of church-goers, as you appropriately call them, is to get as comfortable a position as they can, in which to repeat the routine of words as they are uttered by the appointed minister. Let me just ask you, do you think that can be acceptable confession of sin, in which the sinner sits and, it may be, yawns at his ease, while he is at the same moment telling GOD, with the most irreverent carelessness and unconcern both of tone and manner, that he has been following too much the devices and desires of his own heart, and offending against His holy laws? Depend upon it, Mr. Blandford, he

is the true church-goer, who carries home with him the savour of the ordinances in which he has been engaged; whose conduct, when beyond its walls, testifies that he is a consistent follower of the Lord Jesus; who, in what he does within as well as without GOD'S house, does all to the glory of GOD: of whom, in his whole life and conversation, it can be clearly noted that he has indeed been with Jesus; who makes GOD'S Word his guide, GOD'S will his motive, and GOD'S glory his end.

"Now," I said, "let us come a little nearer home; we have spoken of public prayer, let me ask you one plain question about private prayer. You will not, I am sure, now shrink from the truth. Were you a man of prayer? Did you pray every day?"

He hesitated a little, and then said,

"I will tell the truth, sir, as far as I can. Had you asked me the question in my days of health, I should have answered 'Yes,' without scruple, for I think I did say some prayers most days. To be sure, in the morning I do n't think I did very often, for, though I got up early, I was sure to hear some of the men moving about before me, in the yard or elsewhere, and I wanted to get out to them; and I do n't deny that I often, very often, perhaps mostly, omitted prayer then, but I think I did say my prayers most nights."

"In bed, or out of bed?" was my inquiry.

He coloured deeply, and after a short pause said,

"Ah, sir, I see it now; but I used to delude myself with thinking I was quieter in bed, and had nothing to disturb me."

"You thought so *then;* do you think so now?" I asked.

"Oh no, no," he repeated with eagerness, "God forbid!"

"Well, then, Mr. Blandford," I said, "let me now just sum up your amount of religion—that quantum of religion which you thought sufficient to carry you decently through life, and safely through death. First, I will allow a tolerably decent and regular outward observance of the Sabbath, by attending at your parish church—present in body, absent in mind and heart; hearing the most gracious invitations, the most precious promises, and the most awful threatenings, and alike regardless and indifferent to all. No eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to perceive and understand. The richest banquet of heavenly love and mercy continually spread before you, unvisited and untasted. You heard of a loving Saviour, who died to put away your sins, but you esteemed Him not; you preferred your farm, your merchandise, and your traffic; these absorbed your thoughts, even in God's own house. His body broken and His blood shed on the cross you passed by on the other side, as if a common and unholy thing; the promise of His Holy Spirit, you heeded it not, and therefore sought it not. Such were Sabbath duties and Sabbath privileges with

yourself; and what shall I say of those under your control? I do not say, Mr. Blandford, that your flail was busy in the barn, or your ploughs in the field; but your shepherd tended his flocks from morning till night, and never had time for Sunday rest, nor even Sunday cleanliness; your boys were detained from school and church to scare the birds from the seed, or mind the swine in your stubble; your fat cattle were to be fed and foddered and watered, and occupied a man's constant attendance through the Sabbath; the horses that you bought at fairs were continually travelling and coming home on Sundays with their grooms and attendants; and then came all the preparations for the Monday's work, so that I might really say of your household and your farm-servants,

'E'en Sunday shone no Sabbath-day for them.'

"And then," I continued, "what has been the amount of your daily religion? Forgetfulness in the morning, insult and mockery at night. Was that *prayer* which you then offered? were the drowsy accents of your sleepy senses the heart-felt cry of an awakened, perishing sinner? was that the fitting posture of a creature in the presence of his Creator, of a criminal before his Judge, or of a child before his Father? Hear what the Lord says of such service"—and I turned to the prophet Malachi, and read,

"'A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master. If I then be a Father, where is mine honour?

And if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you that despise my name.'

"Can you then wonder, Mr. Blandford, that the Word of God described you, in those days, as one having a name to live, but in reality 'dead'? Do you now ask, what is meant by being 'dead'—'dead in trespasses and sins'? And if a change has been wrought in you, and the veil has been removed not from your eyes only but your heart, and you begin to cry out, 'Lord! be merciful to me, a sinner;' 'for Thy name's sake, O Lord, be merciful unto my sin, for it is great!' if such be the change, give glory, and praise, and thanksgiving to Him whose Spirit has wrought it; and say, from your own experience and conviction, that it is good for you also that you have been afflicted; that before you were afflicted you went wrong, and that whereas you were blind, now you see.

"You, at least, my friend, can individually answer your own question—that sickness and suffering in the hand of God are among His choicest mercies to a sinful and fallen world; and that Paul knew well the Christian's tenure, when he would confirm the souls of the disciples, by telling them that through much tribulation they, and he, and all must enter into the kingdom of God."

CHAPTER VIII.

THIS narrative might be prolonged to a very unwarrantable length, were a detail of every conversation to be given. My purpose is to give those only which may, in some measure, elucidate HENRY BLANDFORD'S character, and those gradual steps by which he was mercifully led to a more correct estimate of himself. Humanly speaking, he appeared one of that class on whom one is apt to think the least impression can be made. Outwardly decent in all observances of life, moral and correct in those relations of it which most met the public eye, and perfectly self-satisfied, and undisturbed by the slightest apprehension of insecurity, his family and friends, with strictest truth, might have had engraven on his tombstone the usual amount of human approval and human testimony, "a kind husband, an affectionate father, and a faithful friend." And no doubt such a record would have been a faithful transcript of the man, as he appeared to his fellow-men; nor is there a churchyard in the land that does not present many a similar memorial; and yet how little, even in its amplest latitude and its veriest truth, does it tell us of the inner man, of the state of the heart with GOD, and of the assured hope of the Christian. It has been said, indeed, that every tombstone contains a sermon, and so

in one very effective sense it does; and in another sense also it might preach very solemnly, did it confine itself to the solemn texts,

"That teach the rustic moralist to die,"

or even to the unwritten homily that lifts up its voice from the house appointed for all living;' but, alas! who can peruse these memorials of the departed, and not acknowledge that 'vanity of vanities' is the text that may be engraven on most?

Mr. BLANDFORD'S illness continued for nearly three years: sometimes he was considerably better in physical health, and sometimes brought very low; but he never again quitted his room, nor do I think that, latterly at least, he felt even the desire to do so. During the few last months of his existence, his strength ebbed away with more than usual rapidity, and though one would naturally have expected that his mental powers would have yielded in equal proportion, it was not so, and the Lord mercifully spared him an almost unclouded intellect even to the very last. I do not imagine that he suffered any severe pains of sickness; at least he made no complaint of any, and there was therefore no occasion for that sad and melancholy resource of medical art in throwing in opiates and narcotics, which, though they may still, assuredly stupify also, and, in an hour when one would most covet for oneself and others all the ebbing strength and energy which may be vouchsafed for the

conflict, man in mistaken kindness too often contrives for death to come in the midst of stupor and unconsciousness.

It was not so, however, with him of whom I am now writing. He had set his house in order, as regarded his temporal affairs, and having done that, he had, as he expressed himself, "shaken hands with the world for good." His cattle lowed, and his sheep bleated still within his hearing; the sound of the busy untiring flail could be heard in the stillness of his chamber, but they seemed alike to fall on unheeding ears. One summer evening I was sitting with him; the window was open, and the balmy air played into the room with peculiar freshness. He seemed to enjoy the scene, and remarked the beauty of the setting sun, and the gorgeous radiance of the sky. I do not know if any of my readers have ever remarked it, but it has frequently impressed itself on my own observation, how insensibly spiritual truth expands the natural intellect, refines the language, and gives almost the semblance of eloquence, if not its reality, even to the untutored observations of the illiterate. It may be that in some degree their phraseology is richly tinctured with the language and imagery of the Bible —that precious well-head of English undefiled, which, with all its errors of mistranslation, one would grieve indeed, if in any rash moment of concession it were handed over to miscalled revision and amendment— or, as I more firmly believe, that as the Lord gave to

His beloved the tongue of the learned, that He should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary, so He wakeneth the ear of all His to hear as the learned; and His own promise is fulfilled, that if any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of GOD: and that if any man lack wisdom, and asketh of GOD, He will give liberally and abundantly, according as every man hath need. It was so in the present instance in a very remarkable degree. Mr. BLANDFORD was not indeed in the strict sense of the word an illiterate man; one could not have said of him, as the Jews contemptuously said of Jesus, "How knoweth this man letters, seeing he hath never learned?" But, though a shrewd, strong-headed, clear-sighted man as far as the interests of this world went, and, as the preceding conversations may show, with a quick ready common sense on common points, he was still an uneducated man. I feel almost sure that he had never during the whole course of his life read a single book for instruction, or even amusement, till his illness drove him to the Bible: but though I could at a much earlier date discover how the eyes of his understanding were being gradually opened and enlightened, yet it was not till a much later period that I was led to notice the striking change in his language, and then only when his spirit was wrought up to an intensity of feeling, such as on this lovely summer's evening, when the glorious rays of the setting sun were deck-

ing the sky, and, in all their variety of fantastic shape and hue, were fleeting and disappearing one after another. I watched his intense and earnest look, and at last said, as if replying to his thoughts,

"It is indeed a glorious sight."

"Aye, sir, I have often sat at yon window, and seen the summer sunset, while the whole western sky seemed on fire with its brightness; and even after it had sunk below the horizon, the clouds still glowed with its radiance. I have watched them, shape after shape, and hue after hue, gradually disappearing, till all has faded away; and I have thought of the wondrous wealth there must be in that Being who could create such glorious objects and such splendid scenes only to pass away; and it has often made me think too how soon all of earth and earth's splendour vanishes. Yon sun is GOD's work, but even that sinks into darkness, and is one day to be turned into blood. Yes!" he continued, "all things fade away; 'the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, the world itself languisheth and fadeth away; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.' But there is an inheritance, reserved in heaven, that does *not* fade away; 'there is a crown of glory that fadeth not.' Ah! sir, how different my thoughts now! I can rejoice to see all things here passing away, and long for that rest which remaineth for the people of GOD. And yet," he added with a sigh, "while I remain here, I

wish I could do something; it seems sad to be so utterly helpless."

"'Did we know,' Mr. Blandford, says old Flavel, 'the desert of our sin, we should rather wonder to see one mercy left than twenty cut off,' and you have many left; nay, you have opportunities of much usefulness even now."

"I wish I knew them; I should be so glad to be useful."

"There are those around you," I replied, "to whom a word spoken in season may be attended with much blessing. You are on the confines of both worlds; you have found the emptiness of the one you are quitting, its insufficiency in the hour of need to speak peace to the troubled soul; and you have also, I trust, found, and know by blessed experience, that, as there is no happiness but in GOD, so is there no hope but in Christ. I would say then to you, as that Saviour said to the poor demoniac whom He had healed, and who earnestly besought that he might follow Him, 'Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.' So I would say, there are those in your own household to whom you may speak out of the abundance of your heart. When Andrew first saw and knew Jesus as 'the Lamb of GOD, that taketh away the sin of the world,' it is said of him, that he first findeth his own brother, and saith

unto him, 'We have found the Christ.' It is not like the finding of an earthly treasure, which a man might desire to keep for himself; he who has found this treasure, this pearl of great price, who has experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in his own heart, and knows the fulness and freeness of the salvation wrought for him and in him, is earnest to give utterance to the thoughts that burn within him, and to say to others, as Moses said to his brother-in-law, 'Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.' A sick and a dying man, Mr. Blandford, has opportunities of thus doing good, of which he should not be negligent. He speaks, under such circumstances, far more emphatically and persuasively than the minister who prays by his bed-side; no one doubts his sincerity, no one questions his motives; conviction is on every word he utters; like the preacher of old, he preaches,

> 'As though he ne'er should preach again,
> And like a dying man to dying men,'

and few incline to disregard that voice, which they know will soon be silent in the grave."

"I have spoken a good deal to my children; they are good children, and I hope and think will prove a comfort to their poor mother, when I am gone."

"I trust and believe they will," I said; "but are there no others to whom you could speak a word in season? are there none on whom it might leave a salutary impression to witness and to hear from your

own lips the testimony of what God hath wrought, none of your neighbours and acquaintances, who may come to see you, and who only knew you in your days of health as minding earthly things and seeking treasure here? Have you no labourers and work-people, whose remembrance is chiefly of harsh words and overbearing temper?"

He appeared in deep thought for some seconds, and then said, "You are quite right; I am glad you have mentioned it; it had not occurred to me; I will begin with Will Owen, and have him here this very evening. I owe him much for former unkindness and neglect. But I do n't think I can see them all at once, it would be too much for me; and besides, I do n't think I could talk to all at once."

"By no means; it would be far better to see them separately, and as you find you can bear it. I am glad you will see Owen first. I confess I was anxious to lead you to this result, as regards Owen, and rejoice that you have so readily anticipated my purpose. He has been, you know, somewhat of an outcast, and I have often thought has had hard measure dealt him by his friends and relations, which has in some degree broken down his self-respect, and led to habits which have not improved his worldly fortunes, and have thrown a darker shade over his character than in justice belongs to it."

Mr. Blandford was not a man, even in sickness, to defer what he meant to do; nay, because of sick-

ness he was the more urgent to do it. He remembered the wise man's injunction, 'Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest;' and consequently ere a week had passed he had seen every one of his men separately and alone. I am not therefore capable, even if I were desirous, of detailing the purport of his conversation with each. I could perceive, however, that they had not been altogether without influence, even as regarded their external conduct, and that with whatever feelings each one had entered the sick man's chamber, they had one and all quitted it with saddened looks and with kindlier thoughts towards him who had addressed them. There was a quietude and regularity about their movements in the farm and in the house, which seemed to say, 'Master would wish it so, if he were here to order us;' and above all, I was glad to see that poor Will Owen had been advanced to the post of foreman, and in that capacity seemed at once to have taken an immense stride to sobriety of demeanour and steadiness of character.

The scene was now nearly closing; one morning, on calling, I found him once more confined to his bed, from which he never rose. He appeared in much suffering, though his looks alone indicated it, and I said,

"I am afraid, my poor friend, you are suffering much pain."

"Yes!" he replied, "dying work is hard work; but 'why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?' 'Fellow-sinners, and therefore fellow-sufferers,' you once said to me, and I now feel its truth. 'GOD be merciful to me a sinner!'"

At another time I found his wife moistening his parched lips with wine and water, and executing those numberless little offices of love, which affectionate experience renders so inexpressibly soothing to the departing spirit.

"Ah! Mr. Blandford," I said, "how *your* last hours are watched over by affection, and soothed by tenderness! When Jesus died for you upon the cross, there was no friend at hand to minister comfort to him. *His* mother and *His* friends stood afar off, and were not allowed to soothe the agonies they witnessed. When with parched lips He cried, 'I thirst,' they gave him only vinegar to drink, mingled with gall; no accents of love fell on his dying ears. Hear what He himself says of the agony of His soul, 'I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.'

"How different the scene here! And yet," I added, "even this earthly love has its limits and its boundaries which it cannot pass. Friends and relations may watch your parting breath, may catch your last gasping sigh, and even go with you to the grave's edge, but there they must leave you; they cannot go beyond. But you need fear no ill, Jesus is with you

there; and as you walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death, His rod and His staff they comfort you."

Scarcely six years had passed since Mr. BLANDFORD had himself stood a mourner by the side of his daughter's grave, and of those who then stood around, few, save his own immediate family, had looked upon him with an eye of sympathy or kindness. Yet when he himself was lowered into the same grave, I believe there was not one that was not subdued into something of softened and even of reverential feeling. His lengthened illness, his altered demeanour, his known change of heart, his subdued temper, had won for him a regard and respect which his proudest days of prosperity had never gained; and the feeling most prevalent in every heart and on every tongue was, "What hath GOD wrought!" He might, indeed, have chosen a different path himself, but GOD had done all things well; and happy, thrice happy, for him, that "GOD's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts."

THE CONVICT.

"Yes! there are real mourners—I have seen
A fair, sad girl, mild, suffering, and serene;
Attention through the day her duties claimed,
And to be useful as resigned she aimed;
But when her wearied *children* sunk to sleep;
She sought her place to meditate and weep.
Then to her mind was all the past displayed,
That faithful memory brings to sorrow's aid."

Crabbe's Poems.

"Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest."

Shakspeare.

How strange, at fifty, to retrace the plan
Of all life's schemes from boyhood up to man!
The hopes that budded, and the blossoms gay,
When eighteen years first lent their bright array!
When all seemed easy to the buoyant heart,
And disappointment played no gloomy part;

When dreams and visions shed their mystic haze,
And youth but revelled in enchantment's maze!
No sickness then had writhed the pliant limb,
No sorrow checked the momentary whim:—
Tears might have fallen for some bauble lost,
A sigh excited for some fancy crossed;
But April suns soon lent their brighter ray,
And all was gladsome as an Eastern day.
It matters not the class—in hall or farm—
Hope's tale, though varied, has alike its charm;
The peer's proud scion in his lordly hall,
The gipsy youth that has no home at all,
The cloistered student, and the rustic boor,
By Cam or Isis, whether rich or poor,
Each in his sphere his own fair vision views,
Takes the same glass, and sees the self-same hues.
True, their grandsires will gravely talk of life
As of a scene of sorrow and of strife;
Point to some grey-haired man, whose furrowed cheek
And sunken eyes of disappointment speak,
And say—"He too, my son, in early youth
Thought fancy's dreams reality and truth,
Painted the future as you paint it now,
And wore as gay a look, as smooth a brow;

And yet but ask him what those dreams he 'd call—
He 'd sadly sigh and say—' 'T was gilding all,
A meagre coating, which, in few, few years,
Was all erased by sorrow's genuine tears!' "
Look at yon man, with hobbling step and slow,
With flannel swathed, and gout in every toe,
With stooping gait, and crutch in either hand,
Too weak to walk, almost too weak to stand.
From his moist brow he wipes the starting drop,
When pain compels him for a while to stop;
The deep-drawn sigh, the frowning brow reveals,
How keen each twinge through every limb that thrills.
He was the blithest lad I knew at school,
In every frolic first, and foremost tool;
No bounds could hold him, and no fears restrain,
Heedless alike of voice, or birch, or cane;
Skilful at taw while taws beseemed his age,
Then cricket came, his manlier thoughts t' engage;
Quick was his eye, his hand, and every limb,
Long-stop or point, 't was all the same to him:
Methinks I see him now—with stalwart blow,
Bounding the ball from well-oiled bat would go;
" Bravo—well hit! 't is good at least for four—
Run, run, my lad—aye, that 's the way to score!

Pleased with th' applause, the youth the struggle plies,
Skims o'er the sward, and o'er the wicket flies,
Twirled o'er his head the bat with rapid bound,
And caught it safely ere it reached the ground.
Yes, that same hobbling man you yonder see,
Oh! a blithe lad and cricketer was he!

I often meet a tramper in my rounds
Who owns no home, and spurns all decent bounds;
A name no doubt he has—but here, alack!
He 's only known by that of Blinkum Jack;
Poor Blinkum! still thou meet'st a merry cheer
When gossips, like thyself, can hail thee near;
And thy loud laugh and joyous song can cheat
Some weaker fool to stand the nightly treat,
Till the late hour and drowsy landlord warn
Them to their beds, and thee to lonely barn,
Where straw at hand its niggard warmth bestows,
And some old sacks suffice instead of clothes;
Then in the morn thou 'rt off again to stray,
Till welcome night shall close the weary day.
At distance seen, one knows the slouching tread,
The dingy pipe, and night-cap on the head,
The tattered vest, which serves for shirt and all,
The legless somethings, which you trousers call,

And wallet hung upon thy stooping back,
As if, forsooth, thou hadst a pedlar's pack,—
A sorry compound,—everything by turn,—
Yet what the good must pity and must spurn.
And did some mother's bosom throb for thee
In that strong hour of nature's agony,
When gushing tears, with fresh-awakened joy,
Welcomed to life her first, her new-born boy;
And as each year disclosed its opening grace,
Smiled as it smiled, and blessed its pretty face?
Aye—it is true, yon outcast man of yore
A mother in her lap in fondness bore;
Nay more, she taught his tiny hands to raise,
Like infant Samuel, in prayer and praise,
And through the vista of advancing years,
Saw the bright solace of her early tears.
Yet tears have fall'n, more sad than mothers shed
E'en o'er the grave where lie the early dead;
And that fond child, so dear, so precious then,
Now roams an outcast 'mong his fellow-men!
Another outcast do I sometimes meet,
Seldom, not often, in my parish beat;
Called Bimbo he—why so, I cannot tell,
But he resents not—perhaps, likes it well:

"Bimbo or Limbo, 't is all one to me,
Satan or saint, no difference I see."
Gloomy, morose, no eye could see within
His darkened thoughts—unsocial e'en in sin:
Alike to him did men approve, condemn,
They spake no good of him, nor he of them.
A wife there was, a sickly look she wore,
Two children also—once 't was said were four,—
I know not, none could ever read or trace
The hidden meanings of that sullen face.
Tyrant and miser, from beneath that roof
Neighbour and friend alike would stand aloof;
No prattlers met him at his garden-gate—
An oath and blow alike their law and fate;
And his sad wife—ah! words must not disclose
The sickening thoughts that in her bosom rose.
Yet once from him did honeyed accents fall,
And that fond maiden had believed them all,
Nor dreamed of wedded tie how deep the curse,
When not for better, 't is alone for worse!
Perchance e'en now some truant fancies roam
To the bright scenes of girlhood's early home,
When her own father—oh, how different he!
Almost a child himself, had shared her glee.

How quickly fade the day-dreams of our youth
Before the stern reality of truth!
No doubt the error may in part be traced
To headlong will—wrong judgment—love misplaced—
And, it may be, in erring parents' eyes,
Their wiser choice proves but a sacrifice.
And yet, perhaps, as we advance in years,
And calmer judgment the dimmed vision clears—
As sobered reason weighs the even scale,
When joys or woes, or good or ill, assail,
And purer faith with light unerring scans,
Of all GOD'S ways, His wise and gracious plans,
When on the troubled soul breaks in a ray,
And trials e'en are found but mercy's way—
Part of the discipline by love designed
To lead to holier hope the wayward mind—
And when we trace, at life's eventful close,
The "tangled yarn" alike of joys and woes,
The grateful heart with holy fervour sees
Mercy and love alone in Heaven's decrees!
Sunshine or storm, the calm or billowy wave,
Alike are sent to waft us to the grave—
The winnowing van that leaves the precious seed,
And scatters far the chaff or noxious weed!

But to my tale: the line yet lingers long,
Ere it assumes the subject of my song.
No hero he, in grandeur's annals known,
No lineage traced on monumental stone,
A simple rustic—Bryant was his name,
And yet that name unstained by guilt or shame,
Till in an hour the wily tempter came.

Not altogether in the lowest place,
'Mid village hinds, was found his rustic race.
His father foreman on a farm was known,
An uncle tilled some acres all his own—
A childless uncle, and in nephew's eyes
No doubt, as such, a fair and honest prize;
And James looked onward to the time when he,
Himself a farmer, in his place should be.

At village school, 'mid others of his class,
More than fair muster would the urchin pass.
He loved not learning, but he loved applause,
And so they followed as effect and cause,
And his eye glistened, as with meaning face
The master called—"Bright Bryant to his place!"
The wit was small, but still it wonder woke
That one so grave should condescend to joke.

And the grave man himself was pleased to see
That, though so young, they could such critics be.
Time wended onwards; the tall stripling grew
Fast into youth, and youthful frolics too—
"Follies," perchance, some wiser ones would say,
And kinder ones would call mere boyish play,
While the light-hearted would unheeding laugh—
"The seed was good, 't was but the winnowing chaff."
Yet still no harm the indulgent parents saw,
Youth has its whims, and nature has its law:
In his light laugh, that 'neath their roof-tree rung,
They jocund joined, and felt themselves grow young:
Parents, no doubt, too oft reverse the glass
Through which their children's faults and virtues pass,
And think the couplet is for them designed—
"Blind to their follies, to their virtues kind."
Yet partial love in James no error saw,
Not flippancy itself could find a flaw.
Somewhat, perhaps, he roamed too near the edge,
Yet nought that malice could in truth allege,
And, though grave heads would shake, James Bryant's name
Had nought to give e'en currency to shame;

A favoured guest, where'er he chose to roam,
And still more favoured when he stayed at home.
Now came the destined hour that comes to all,
When youth impetuous in love will fall;
Not but our youth had felt some shocks before,
Some few slight scratches, which he called a sore,
While laughing eyes, with air like village flirt,
More truly said, "I am not greatly hurt"—
Love's lighter skirmishes—the look, the eye,
The hand's fond pressure, the incipient sigh,
Like bird scarce fledged that practises to fly!
Ah! turn not captious from the muse that tells
The loves and heart-aches of our village belles!
"Love laughs at locksmiths," so the playwright says—
I 'm sure he laughs at rank and pride of place.
Though the heart beats not 'neath a silken vest,
Nor throbbing heads on downy pillows rest,
Yet there are ways, and maidens find those ways,
When every grade its vanity displays—
Some little knack of finery or dress,
Which its own meaning can as well express,
And rustic taste can ape the smart design,
If not as costly, quite at least as fine;

When the dull glass that 's scarce six inches square
Reflects but features that they think as fair,
While on the shelf the phial stands—why not?
To give the glossy hue, or scent of bergamot.
Alas! the flippant line may idly trace
The venial follies of our rustic race;
But sterner truth with sadder hues must paint,
Of love of dress the misery and taint—
The fatal lure that draws all victims in,
The cheapest bait which Satan keeps for sin;
Choicest yet cheapest, they so easy bite,
They almost seem the Tempter's self t' invite.
As anglers know a gaudier fly will take,
When living bait the heedless fish forsake;
So some he tempts with satins, jewels, lace,
With others ribbon or a bit of paste.
Why should he waste the costlier bribe on her
Who, after all, the tinsel will prefer?
When in her native purity arrayed,
In Eden roamed creation's new-born maid,
No outward ornament bestowed its grace—
GOD'S image shone resplendent in her face,
Till entered sin and death; then dress became
At once the garb and symbol of her shame!

'T was mercy yet—but soon the Tempter spied
How vast an inlet to the poorest pride,
With ready zeal the flimsy veil supplies,
And calls it ornament in woman's eyes!
Oh! vain attempt, sad impotence of pride!
Sin's leprous taint, though every art be tried,
Nor silks nor satins now, nor fig-leaves then could hide!

But to my tale—'T is strange the pen will stray
To every object in its devious way,
Pluck the wild-flowers as it roams along,
Or idly stop to moralize in song.
My heroine calls—a village lass, 't is true—
Yet what has love with rank or name to do?
As happy he beneath the lowly cot,
As in the halls where grandeur has its lot.
And such was Susan West; her simple air
Bespoke her modest, innocent as fair—
Calm, quiet, neat, good-natured, and sincere,
She walked contented in her lowly sphere.
A mother's place she fondly strove to fill—
A mother's love, and yet a sister's still;
The blended two so gracefully unite,
That each was lovely as it met the sight;

At times a teacher with the young in prayer,
At times as willing in their romps to share:
Thoughtful yet playful, grave yet often gay,
Her noiseless life passed usefully away.
She sought not notice, yet it came unwooed,
And love at last found out her solitude.
Yet not at first the maiden lent her ear,
Or gave her heart without a rising fear——

"'T is not thy love I doubt—I know to me
Thy love will prove as true as mine to thee:
I fear not that—but canst thou bear to hear
What prudence whispers? Nay, look not severe,
At least not sad—Ah! now you smile, I 'll tell
The throbbing thoughts that in my bosom dwell.
Nor you, nor I, dear James, as yet have known
What means that word—'to trust ourselves alone.'
Each day that dawns has brought its wonted store,
Almost unasked, nor have we needed more;
We 've found as yet beneath our parents' roof
Each want supplied, and care has kept aloof.
They bore the burden, we have welcome shared
All that their love and industry have spared;
If times were hard, they fared the harder too,
And want as yet has reached nor me nor you."

"I know it, dearest—know the debt I owe,
How love for others will itself forego
Much that it needs, nor murmur; and shall I
Such love for thee ungratefully deny?
This arm 's as strong, this heart as blithe and true,
And our own cot shall childhood's home renew."

"Nay, 't is not that; I know that strength and health,
With GOD's best blessing, is the poor man's wealth.
I know contentment can its boon afford,
And spread with dainties e'en our humble board,
And love can sweeten, too, the simplest fare."——

"Oh, then, how sweet with thee that love to share!
Why, Susan, you have made us rich—what more?
Health, strength, content, GOD's love—an ample store!
Duties shall be our joys: those joys shall be
Purer and sweeter far, when shared with thee!"

"Aye, James, *that* wealth would make us rich indeed;
But yet—nay hush—let woman's caution plead
One other fear—*Will* duties be your joy?
Will home and home's own ties your thoughts employ?
Or, when the novel charm has passed away,
Will old companionship resume its sway?
And thy poor Susan left at home, to rue
That she has proved herself a prophet true?"

"Now, 't is unkind to speak, far more to feel,
What these thy words so painfully reveal:
Some friend, perhaps, has whispered in your ear,
Some meddling fool has conjured up this fear,
Some doting grand-dame has perchance looked wise,
And gossip spread what truth itself denies.
Ask those who know—ask thine own kinder heart,
Let that its answer honestly impart;
Think you so meanly of my love at best,
That time and change will prove a fatal test?
No, Susan, no, true joy may not be ours,
Sorrow may steal upon our midnight hours;
Corroding care may pale thy cheek's young bloom,
Or death consign me to an early tomb.—
Nay, weep not, love; our hair may change to white,
And all around us alter to our sight;
But never love—no, that will not decay,
Whatever grand-dames in their dotage say!"
Poor Susan smiled, while love detailed its schemes,
Nor did she think them altogether dreams,
At least they seemed so fair, so near to truth,
And hope so blended with the trust of youth,
And, as we know, in every lover's creed,
The adage runs—"to doubt is to concede,"

Ah ! let not then prophetic taunt deride,
That Susan West became James Bryant's bride!

* * * * *

Five years had passed, and those five years had been
Of shade and sunshine but a blended scene—
Life's usual landscape, where so fitful play
The varying phases of an April day;
At times so fair, so clear, as if no storm
Could the pure azure of the sky deform;
Then gathering clouds that o'er th' horizon cast
Its threatening darkness, till the tempest passed.
Trials no doubt they were, but such as shed
Their wholesome chastening o'er the mourner's head,
As pensile blossoms, when o'ercharged with rain,
Droop their frail heads to raise them up again.
Parental cares their lowly home had blessed—
Three still survived, and one had gone to rest.
Prophetic fears almost had ceased to fill
The anxious heart with presages of ill:
Comforts so clustered round their peaceful home,
That truant love could find no plea to roam.
Yet came at last a time, when Susan's heart
Would to itself its communings impart.——

"Am I not thankless, nay, perhaps unkind,
To let these phantoms thus perplex my mind?
Yet will they come, e'en in the busy day,
Those weary hours that James must be away;
And oh! what images arise at night,
To torture sleep and agonize my sight!
Yet there is nought—at least not such that speech,
Which would not irritate, can fairly reach:
I know what man sustains must be GOD'S grace,
But oh! that James would seek another place!"
Ah! love might in its anxious moods suspect,
But love is slow, unwilling to detect;
Yet there was that which fear would shape to form,
As birds instinctive dread the coming storm.
The household prayer, in which each coming night
Saw the fond parents with their babes unite—
When from the grateful heart's abundant store,
Their blended voices would thanksgiving pour—
Was now omitted, or at least not shared
By him who needed most its saving guard;
Too late returned, too weary when returned,
The blessing slighted, if it was not spurned.
Poor Susan mourned, yet still she closer drew
To Him who chastened, but who strengthened too;

With firmer faith she sought for aid to guide,
Nor, though not answered, deemed herself denied.
Earth's Sabbaths too—those sweetest days of rest,
Precious to all! to sons of toil the best—
When the worn spirit lays aside its care,
Renewed and freshened in the House of Prayer,
And seems from holy converse strength to borrow
For the fresh claims and labours of the morrow;
These, too, were slighted—not indeed at once,
Yet pleas were found to, step by step, renounce:
An earthly master's call, some cattle's claim—
And Sunday but retained at last its name!
  Alas! how oft our wayward wills pervert
The boon we seek to our own deeper hurt!
How oft, dissatisfied with what we hold,
Some shadowy substance will its form unfold,
Lure with its brighter hopes the restless mind,
And in the end but disappointment find!
So Bryant found—When he with youthful pride
To his own home first brought his new-made bride,
His daily toil his daily wants supplied;
But years passed on, and claims around him grew,
The wants were many, and the means but few.

True, that his daily toil brought no disgrace,
But still, far better was a bailiff's place:
He sought and gained—and where, I pray, the harm,
That James was foreman on Sir Isaac's farm?
An easy man, who as a merchant wrought,
But out of Town a snug estate had bought;
Talked of his crops, and loved to till his own,
But little knew except that seed was sown—
Boasted the pureness of his Southdown breed,
Yet sorely puzzled to explain his creed—
Talked wise of trefoil, turnips, clover, grasses,
Liebeg and Lindley, and Linnæan classes.
On 'Change, no doubt, he to a mite could tell
How Bank-stock rose, or whether Consols fell—
Clear and keen-sighted in his proper grade,
Had farming never mingled in his trade.
His bailiff James—and in their neater cot
E'en Susan owned at first a happier lot;
The duties light, though twice in every week
With produce of the farm he Town must seek.
James liked the journey, liked the gladsome change,
No doubt, at will, through London streets to range;
Something of life he saw—perhaps 't was such
As prudence whispered, "neither taste nor touch."

Friends, too, he found, such friends as markets throng,
Friends of the dram, the tankard, and the song;
Some, too, who hinted in ambiguous phrase,
Of "raising wind" the multifarious ways—
Cant terms of slang that first perplex the brain,
Then win a laugh, at last approval gain.
Why need I linger o'er the painful tale,
How folly falls, and wily arts prevail—
How weakness yielded step by step, till sin,
With all its train of woe, came rushing in?

A road-side house there was—James knew it well,
And travellers hailed it as "The Crown and Bell;"
There teams would halt, and drivers idly wait,
While cattle mumbled their defrauded bait.
A thriving man that kept it—how he throve,
Though many guessed, not one at least could prove;
Dealer in hay and corn, and oats and straw,
And all that 's said to come in "cutter's law;"
Quick at a bargain, and not over-nice,
Baulked by no scruples in a low device.

I 've said Sir Isaac had his easy moods,
Yet e'en on such a captious whim intrudes;
Good nature, too, in spite of self feels cross,
When the time comes to reckon gain and loss.

A book there is, whose columns black and white
Produce resistless figures to the sight,
When the pen lingers on the closing line
That gives of *minus* the unerring sign,
Casts and recasts the total up—in vain!
In vain does memory search the racking brain,
The figures still proclaim but loss instead of gain.
Our merchant's gains on 'Change, no doubt, were large,
But still he winced—who would not?—at a charge
Which touched alike his vanity and purse,
And made the farmer than the merchant worse.
Suspicion rose; and, with suspicion, came
Hints and surmises on that landlord's name:
Some told how carters bartered corn for ale,
Some too who whispered e'en a darker tale,
How wholesale plunder had its banded league
In all its various links of vile intrigue.
Alas! poor James; his name was uttered too,
As found in concert with that felon crew;
Some said a leader—some, but drawn away
By those who practised more despotic sway.
Alas! when once to guilt consent is won,
And folly yields, what weakness first begun,

When once the foot the boundary line has crossed,
Freedom, self-will, and self-control are lost;
Bound hand and foot, the hapless wretch is dragged,
Resistance useless, e'en remonstrance gagged.
Oh! how debasing must that thraldom be,
Which longs, yet dares not, though it could, be free!
One word but uttered had dissolved the spell,
But the heart quailed, the tongue refused to tell.
Seasons no doubt there were, when Susan's tone
Had almost made the dreaded secret known—
When blended grief and love had well nigh wrung
The fatal tidings from his stammering tongue.
Oh, had it been! had grace, with healing fraught,
At heaven's own portals been with fervour sought;
Had e'en his heart, in words unwhispered, prayed
In guilt's deep need for Heaven's upholding aid,
The plague, perhaps, had stayed—sin's riven chain
Had snapped its links, and all been peace again:
But no! no sign was given, no prayer was heard,
The heart uplifted no unwhispered word.
So ruin came—'t is guilt's but usual tale—
And James was inmate of the County gaol!
Soon too, with broken heart, poor Susan hears
Her husband exiled for ten lengthened years.

'T was hard—not harsh—the law must still be just,
And shows no mercy to a broken trust.
Sorrow no doubt there was 'neath prison walls,
But not such sorrow as at home there falls,
Where widow'd wife and orphan'd children mourn
Their sad inheritance of want and scorn,
The withering sorrow of a life of shame,
And taunted with a felon-father's name!
Meek, uncomplaining, nay, with tearless eye,
And voice scarce broken by a heaving sigh,
Poor Susan's sorrows to her GOD were borne,
Who alone heals, what He himself has torn—
The past, the present, nay, the future scanned,
Owned it was Love, and recognised the hand.
Once ere the exile left his native shore,
Or distant billows to his bondage bore,
With heavy heart she sought her husband's cell,
To breathe once more her long, her last farewell.
Alone she went—alas! she could not bear
A child its father's shame should see or share,
On childhood's pliant mind the scene be fixed,
Its sad ingredients in the memory mixed;
The spikéd wall, the gaoler's massive keys,
The bars, the bolts, and oh!—far worse than these—

PRISON SCENE.

"With heavy heart she sought her husband's cell,
To breathe once more her long, her last farewell."—P. 256.

The fetters clanking on a father's frame,
The sight and sound of infamy and shame!
"Oh! Susan dearest, art thou come again?
Thou shouldst have spared thyself at least the pain.
'T is useless too—not e'en thy love can break
The chains which laws and sterner judges make."
"Oh, blame not them, dear James; more truly think,
'T was sin and Satan forged each fatal link!
Ah! those are fetters stronger far than man's,
When folly weaves its own accurséd plans!
But, James, I came not to reproach; I came
To soothe, not sadden—to console, not blame.
In others' eyes—I heed not what they see—
The husband of my youth thou art to me."
"Ah! Susan, once I said in happier hours,
Sorrow unthought, perchance, might yet be ours—
I thought it not, at least not such as this:
I never knew the depth of sin's abyss.
Oh, could but prayers recall! could tears erase!
Could life once more its bygone hours retrace!
Fool that I was to think that wretch my friend,
And worse than fool a listening ear to lend
To what I knew was wrong!—Oh bitter fate,
To gather wisdom when, alas, too late!"

"Oh, not too late, dear James; the hour will be—
Nay, may be now—when you shall yet be free;
Not from those fetters that enchain your frame,
Not from the taint that must degrade thy name;
Free e'en in exile, e'en in bondage clear,
Angels rejoicing shall thy spirit cheer,
And thy own Susan smile, the gladdening change to hear!"

"I know thee, Susan, know thy generous heart
Seeks but to act the Christian teacher's part;
And had I learned—but no, I will not dwell—
Conscience now speaks too loudly and too well—
How wilt thou, dearest, bear thy widowed lot,
By many taunted, and by most forgot!
Those dear ones, too! their childhood's years demand
A father's labour, and a father's hand.
Must parish aid with scanty pittance lend
Its niggard help, or charity befriend?
Ten tardy years!—O Susan, when that space
Has dragged along its slow, its lingering pace,
How shall I meet thee!—Nay, perhaps the grave
Ere then shall cover the degraded slave,
Unwept, unhonoured, on yon distant shore,
My name, my guilt, my sorrow heard no more.

Or if, perchance, in spite of crowding fears,
I still survive those slowly dragging years,
My feeble limbs, and worn and wasted frame,
Be the lone records of a life of shame!"

"Oh! speak not so, dear James, there 's mercy still,
And faith that triumphs o'er each earthly ill.
That Eye that guards me in my native land,
Will guard thee too upon Australia's strand;
He clothes the grass, He feeds the birds of air,
And bids us too repose on Him our care.
Time is not tardy; we too oft complain
How speeds its flight—how short its fleeting reign!
Years pass away, their tale is quickly told,
And thou shalt yet thy own sweet home behold!
A scornful world perhaps may spread thy shame—
I 'll teach our children to revere thy name;
By none forgotten in their daily prayer,
E'en in thy absence thou their love shalt share."

* * * * *

Ten years have passed, and half that number more,
Yet James returns not to his native shore.
Day after day prolongs the sickening tale
Of hope delayed—of fears that will assail,

Fears of some sorrow, perhaps undefined,
Dim, indistinct, yet crowding on the mind,
Fears that by day weigh down the weary breast,
Fears that by night corrode the starting rest!
He came not still—no tidings reached his home
Whither the wanderer had essayed to roam:
That he still lived the rumour reached her ears,
And that but added to her former fears.
Her children grew to manhood—they had known
A mother's care, a mother's love alone!
Yet times had been when sickness, want, and woe
Had all united in their triple blow;
Yet they had grown to youth, not strong, nor tall—
A blighted look seemed grafted on them all,
That look which told of penury's pinching days,
That look which hunger's withering gripe displays!
One too, the youngest, and his mother's pride,
At eighteen sickened, and declined, and died.
Poor Susan! yet no word of murmur fell,
She crushed the thought that would within her swell,
Crushed e'en reproach, and prayed that kindlier thought
Of him far distant should in love be taught.

And then at last she wrote—a father's heart
Perhaps might yet be touched! With simple art
She spoke of joys that Heaven had yet in store,
And touched but lightly on the grief she bore;
Told of some treasures which she still preserved,
Memorials of a love which never swerved;
Told how Sir Isaac long had gone to rest,
And all memorial of the past suppressed;
That kindly thoughts alone remained, and all
The long-lost wanderer would with love recall.
'T was sent at random, yet with fervent prayer
That Heaven would grant it its especial care;
And many a lingering week and month had passed,
And each seemed sad and hopeless as the last.
Then came the answer—How perplexed the will,
Which longs to read, yet dreads the coming ill!
Hours passed away, and still her hands retained
The unopened page—it seemed though sense were
chained,
Or the eye strove to pierce its folded page
That, half-deciphered, might her throbs assuage!
Night came; her sons returned from toil,
She told them not—she feared their rest to spoil;

Then when she heard their peaceful breathings tell
How slumber on their weary eye-lids fell,
Calmly she rose, and first, on bended knees,
Sought in firm prayer her throbbing heart to ease,
Took all her cares, her sorrows all to GOD,
And prayed for meekness but to kiss His rod.
So calm her spirits as the lines she read,
She scarcely recognised her former dread;
The blow at distance seemed as though too great,
Now, close at hand, half-lightened of its weight.
It said—no doubt untruly—" He had heard
That Susan had some other hand preferred;
That thus forsaken, he himself had found
Some other solace on Australian ground.
'T was a mischance, perhaps, but Susan knew
He ne'er had wandered, had he thought her true.
If means permitted he would send her aid—
Love to his children begged might be conveyed;
Then coldly added that he wished her well,
And sent to all his long, his last farewell."
Poor Susan read, re-read, and read again,
And tried to find one word of love—in vain!
Each line was cold, was heartless—nay, 't was more,
It carried insult to her bosom's core.

Slowly she paused—she asked for aid to guide,
For grace to crush a woman's wounded pride;
And who shall blame, as o'er the lengthened past,
From youth almost to age, one glance she cast,
The gushing tears in rapid courses sped,
When the last lingering hope for ever fled!
It passed away, and soon, with steady aim,
She gave the letter to the kindly flame,
And as each vestige one by one withdrew,
Her heart seemed lightened of its burden too.
No trace remained—it seemed as though the tomb
Had swallowed all in death's devouring doom:
Earth's duties still remained—a few, few years,
No trace would linger of life's saddening tears!
Next morn with wonted, uncomplaining air,
In life's few duties Susan took her share,
Nor child nor neighbour knew the fatal truth—
FOR EVER BURIED ALL THE HOPES OF YOUTH!

SUPPLEMENTAL CHAPTER.

"De omnibus rebus, et
Quibusdam aliis."
Title of Old Book.

I WOULD fain hope that those kind readers who have accompanied "the Country Parson" thus far in his visits to his poor, may not object to a slight extension of their walk, not so much for the purpose of entering beneath any particular roof or being introduced to any particular individual, as to become acquainted with those more prominent objects which, because they were once interesting to himself, he, perhaps erroneously, thinks must needs be interesting to others.

It is one of the many fallacies which poets have loved to consecrate in their undying verse, that

> "Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,
> Please daily, and whose interest survives
> Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years,"

for the interest which survives the lapse of time is that of the heart, and not of the eye; it is associated with other memories than those of loveliness, and can

"see Helen's beauty on a brow of Egypt." It is said of Descartes that he admired that obliquity of vision, which is vulgarly called "a squint;" and Southey ingeniously, and I think truthfully, accounts for the obliquity of taste by associating a squint with the eye of a nurse to whom he was early and tenderly attached. We see the same truth continually developed in the ever-recurring memories of the exile or the emigrant to the home of his childhood and youth, however lowly or unassociated with aught that could attract the eye, but still bound up with so much that enchains the heart and its best affections.

I am afraid, therefore, dear companion of my way, that I can lead you to no magnificent view, no undulating surface of hill and dale, no wooded heights, nor winding stream. Northamptonshire has its quiet sylvan beauties, and no doubt many a loving heart, in absence, retraces in fond imagination the home of its childhood, and would prefer its rich level pastures, its secluded lodges, its unromantic mills, and even its miry lanes, to all the scenery that annually attracts the tourist's steps to Cumberland or Wales. But, after all, it is the living interest which wins the heart: and though a Northamptonshire village has, in its outward aspect, but little to attract the eye or detain the wandering step, there is much beneath its lowly thatched roofs and within its humble homesteads that may perhaps afford more than the mere interest of the moment or the passing glance.

Kind, patient reader! you have accompanied me to EVELING LODGE, and wandered with me in many a walk with its aged inmate. You have entered, too, poor COOPER GENT'S hovel, and perhaps admired and adored the grace of GOD that sought and found the outcast. You have spent a Sabbath evening in BRADLEY'S cottage, and have, it may be, shed a tear over his premature and painful end. I would fain hope, too, that when your eye has rested on some idiot in its helplessness, you may have thought of GEORGE ELLIOTT, and felt an interest and a pity in their condition unknown before. I have introduced you, too, into the sick chamber of HENRY BLANDFORD, and have there pointed out to you the strong man "kicking against the pricks," "like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," and yet in the end "a wonder unto many."

But I have not yet made you acquainted with my clerk, save that I once incidentally alluded to him in the narrative of EVELING LODGE, as, one Sunday morning, gently pulling at Mr. Eveling's coat to induce him to resume his old seat in the church; and at this moment you are positively ignorant of his name, and had you met him in the streets of Northampton, Kettering, or Harborough, or wherever his avocations might have led him, you would have passed him, I fear, unnoticed and unknown. Let me then supply the omission, and at once introduce you,

"Reader! Joseph Penn, clerk of the parish, and carrier, and higgler to boot."

"Joseph Penn! the reader."

And now that I have thus made you mutually acquainted, let me just add, that a kinder-hearted, more civil, industrious, obliging, hard-working, up-early, and late-resting man never plodded through Northamptonshire's muddy lanes, nor trafficked in her weekly markets, than my good old clerk long since gone to his rest. His voice certainly was not melodious; and, like most village clerks, I suspect he was fully persuaded that the real secret of good reading consisted in rendering the nose, rather than the throat, the channel of the sound; and I have no doubt that many, in their private opinions, thought the clerk a more striking reader than the parson. I do not know whether Penn was a poet, and himself the writer of a sort of epigram that was current for some time in the village, but this I can most truthfully avouch, that he either wrote it himself, or—some one else wrote it for him.

"Though no rector am I, yet I 'm ne'er in the lurch,
And always before him in going to church;
His voice, it may be, is the first to be heard,
Yet none will deny that I have the last word:
I write not his sermons, 't is true—but what then?
He himself could n't write them, if he had not his *pen*.
A strange compound we are, for I pray you to mark,
Though the clerk 's not a *parson*, the parson 's a clerk."

He was certainly proud of his position as clerk, look-

ing upon himself, as no doubt he was, as a public character, and one whom it behoved to comport himself accordingly in all gravity and decorum. It was no doubt in keeping with this persuasion, that, having a large family, he had thought himself bound to select Scripture names for most of his children; and as his own name of "Joseph" was from the same goodly storehouse, it probably had been the practice of many a preceding generation, and handed down, like a box of family pills, as an heir-loom to those that should come after. He had commenced with the book of Ruth, and as the nomenclature of that was soon exhausted, he was going on through the book of Job, with an occasional male sprinkling from Chronicles and Kings. I knew indeed one dictatorial gentleman who ingrafted on his propensity for Scripture names an equal predilection for brevity, and, on the occasion of the first heir-male of the family being born, nearly sent his wife into a fever by insisting that the boy should be named "Huz," or "Buz;" and it was only by the good fortune of the mother stumbling on a still shorter Bible name, that the child was spared the infliction, though the somewhat questionable name of "Er" was actually given as a compromise.

But, however, dear reader, I must not keep you waiting here on the road: I am anxious that you should accompany me to Mr. PENN'S habitation, which stands, or rather stood, at the top of the village

street, just where it diverges into four cross-roads, one of which leads appropriately to the church close by. On the open space in front, on a rising mound or hillock, is a large elm, umbrageously cool and rural; and beneath it stood, in much mock dignity, and to the terror of all the village urchins, the village stocks, a relic of feudal jurisdiction and local power, and which has probably long since vanished, unless, like the old lady in the nursery rhyme,

"On the top of a hill,
Who, if she 's not gone, she lives there still."

However, at the time of which I am speaking the elm was there, and the stocks were there; and many a time have I seen Mr. PENN on a summer evening sitting on the cross-bar of the stocks, beneath the shade of the tree, as if to show the wondering children how his "withers were unwrung," and he could even dare to take his seat on the very engine of penalty and terror.

There was a tradition that PENN'S house had once been the Parsonage, and indeed, as far as dilapidations went, it might have done for any rectory-house in the kingdom; for a more straggling, ill-conditioned, rambling, rumbling, ruinous old place never housed a colony of rats. Some said it was in Chancery with a disputed title, and if so, it certainly did not belie its parentage, but fully testified to the parental care with which that loving step-mother embraces

all her children; but be this as it may, it assuredly reminded one of that suitor of old, who, out at elbows, out at knees, and still more out at purse, boasted that he had gained his cause, though he had lost his suit (of clothes). The most conspicuous object however, and, to be candid with my reader, the one for which I have enticed him here, was a huge ruinous old barn, said to have been in bygone years the tithe-barn of ancient rectors, and over the crumbling rafters and shattered walls of which farmers of the present age, as they rode by, must have often cast a retributive glance of exultation. Its dimensions indeed, in its undilapidated condition, indicated a voracity that might have rivalled the Dragon of Wantley, or at least Solomon's horse-leech: and one was often tempted to parody Pope's line on that mendacious monument, which,

"Like a tall bully rears its head" for more.

It did indeed frequently exercise the young wits and unfledged powers of the embryo poets of our party, and with the following elegy or eulogy I would close this brief notice of the much respected and regretted clerk of "MY PARISH."

SHALL Tintern's walls demand their song,
O'er Raglan's halls shall pilgrims throng,
In wondering gaze survey the pile,
Keep, dungeon, tower, or holy aisle,
Tell of old heroes now no more,
As though they acted heroes o'er?
And shall not one brief strain enshrine
This antique monument of thine?
Shall not one line be found to trace
Where classic ruins hold a place?
Forbid it, song! Forbid it, muse!
While yet remains one cackling goose,
That goose shall lend its ready pen
To laud the ruined barn of PENN.
Hail, wondrous pile! whose yawning sides
Show where, alas! no cheer abides;
Whose riven roofs no more disclose
The well-piled harvest's clustering rows!
Hail, ancient barn! thy battered face
Displays at least one remnant grace,
And fond imagination dreams
Where once, amid thy crumbling beams,

Some chuckling Rector joyous hid
The ripened harvest's pyramid!
Ye rats and mice! who whilom played
In antic gambols 'mid its shade,
And deemed the sport both rich and rare
To rob the parson of his share,
And as he tithed his neighbour's grain,
To take the tithe of him again,—
Lend me your notes! for surely ye,
As erst amid your revelry,
Can tell of many a cleric feast,
(Too long such notes of joy have ceased!)
When field and furrow's rich supplies
Gladdened each mouse's roving eyes:
When rats in whiskered pomp were there,
Tasting each grain with courtly air,
Now pledging this, now toasting that,
With grace peculiar to a rat;
Or, when the joyous feast was o'er,
Threading the dance along the floor,
In mazy gambols sported round,
Heedless if cats or gins were found;
Or, haply, in some snug retreat,
Far from the tread of prying feet,

Some youthful rat with fluttering pride,
With his coy mistress by his side,
Told of some hidden store concealed
(And only to his fair revealed),
And fondly vowed by every oath
That *rat*ifies a rat's pure troth,
To share with her the gathered fruit,
If she but smile upon his suit.
Oh happy days! oh joyous hours!
When tithe-barns lent their jocund powers.
No more for you shall golden field
Its ripened grain and treasures yield,
No more thy echoing walls resound
With *rat*tling mirth extending round;
No more the feast thy floor along;
Past is the banquet and the song!
Or if some sound awake again,
'T is but the melody of PENN,
That strain again! no doubt 't would scare
The sturdiest rat from out his lair.
Hark! 't is the clerk's last nasal psalm,—
Faith! I 'll be gone, for fear of harm.
So farewell, barn! and farewell, PENN!
I will not laud thee e'er again.

In looking over, with perhaps somewhat of egoistical pleasure, the annals of bygone years, I have stumbled on a memorial of my old friend COOPER GENT, which has recalled a long-forgotten scene, at the time indeed no doubt somewhat painful to himself, but still irresistibly ludicrous, and which I am tempted to describe, as it in some measure illustrates the altered character of that once misanthrope and outcast. I have indeed already alluded to the circumstances (vol. i. p. 193), but I hope that a somewhat more detailed account of the incident may be permitted to claim a niche in these annals of "MY PARISH" poor. It singularly developes, too, another trait in COOPER'S character, as it expanded before us in all the cheerfulness of Christian fellowship and love, that he took an especial interest and relish in the amusements and even frolics of the young. It seemed as if all the buoyancy of his own heart in the days of his childhood and youth had only been chilled and frozen up, and for a season had ceased to show sign of life; but that now, in the genial warmth of human sympathy and Christian communion, the natural heart unthawed, and, like Baron Munchausen's horn, gave forth all the tunes and symphonies that had so long lain dormant and choked up in the chill frost of unkindliness and wrong; so that it really seemed as if all the joyousness of each season of his bygone life had now for the first time all at

once unthawed and found vent and outlet: as if spring and summer and autumn, and even winter, were pouring out their symphonies, like cousin Simon's village choir, "in one accord."

Like many of my brethren in the ministry, it was my lot to have under my roof four or five youths as private pupils—a merry band of boys, as I often designated them; and, without the slightest tinge of unkind ridicule or jeer, COOPER GENT was an especial favourite, and vehicle for good-humoured joke and fun. And it was singular that, sensitive as he had been throughout life of the slightest approach to banter, especially from the young, and almost painfully resenting and shrinking, as if from a touch upon a broken limb, from the slightest remark on any peculiarity of conduct or form, he now really seemed to enjoy a joke even at his own expense, from the very class of the young he had hitherto so kicked at.

There was a poor half-witted woman whom we sometimes employed to put COOPER'S tenement to rights, and, as far as she could, clean up and tidy matters for him; and it soon became a regular jest of this coterie of youths, how desirable it would be to establish a matrimonial speculation between the parties. COOPER enjoyed the joke exceedingly, and, it may be, was a little tickled and flattered by the suggestion. But it had nearly led to a fatal *dénouement;* for the ancient fair, one day finding Mr. GENT un-

well, thought herself entitled to prescribe an ounce of salts, but unluckily procured and mixed and administered an ounce of saltpetre instead! It was indeed, in medical phrase, kill or cure with poor GENT, and for some time all joke was superseded in the serious predicament in which the inadvertency of this poor half-witted Phillis had placed her Corydon. Its ill effects however passed away, even the recollection of its torture gradually evaporated: the poor delinquent was restored to her former post, with strict injunctions to dabble no more in the village pharmacopœia, and only the ludicrous character of the incident survived

"To point an epigram or adorn a joke."

Many a pen was poised, and many a squib composed, to record the event, and few enjoyed them more than the Coryphæus of the feast himself,—he at whose expense the whole was furnished. I transcribe one which has floated on the waters of oblivion:

Half of myself! perchance my larger half!
Though fools may scoff, and idle cynics laugh,
Despise not thou the offering I present,
If not a gentleman, at least 't is GENT.
And yet no Gentile I, for still genteel
I gently plead the love for thee I feel.

But oh, my Molly, gentle be thy course,
Nor use the needless stimulants of force.
Salt to one's soup may give a keener zest,
But let saltpetre ever be at rest,—
That "compound villainous," which, wrongly taken,
More surely kills, than, may be, saves man's bacon.
Oh! that dire day, when first I took thy stuff,
And e'en thy COOPER uttered, "Hold, enough;"
Did not my twisting agonies evince
How keen each pang, how tortuous every wince,
When in the inward struggle lost and spent,
E'en Molly's self bewailed her gentle GENT?
Yet still one poison riots in my veins,
Ah! far more keen than e'en saltpetre's pains.
Genteeler fairs let vaunting gentry boast,
Molly alone shall be thy COOPER'S toast.
Cupid has darts and arrows for the assault,
And Molly steeps them in a dose of salt.
Speed on, ye lagging hours, thou tardy sun,
O'er thy blue vault in hastier current run,
Till all astonished see the wondrous pageant
That turns my gentle Molly into a—GENT.

Kind reader! the "Country Parson" bids you "Farewell." It may be, he may yet once more invite you to a further stroll,—no more, indeed, through Northamptonshire lanes, or to the sunny lodges and cheery homesteads which once wooed his steps,—but, if life be spared, over the breezy downs and hills of Surrey.

THE END.

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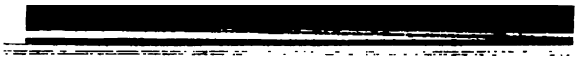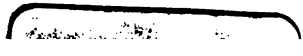
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